R.D. Robertson.

FORTY DAYS IN 1914

FORTY DAYS IN 1914

BY

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR F. MAURICE
K.C.M.G., C.B.

WITH FOUR MAPS

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON
CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD
1919

PREFACE

THIS little book owes its origin to curiosity. I wanted to see if it was possible to discover what the Germans were planning and doing during the retreat from Mons. I found that by piecing together evidence obtainable from the accounts of the early parts of the war published in Germany, in neutral countries, in France, and by Belgian authorities, as well as from the reports of the very full investigations which have been conducted into the German atrocities, in Northern France and in Belgium, it was possible to work out the movements of the German armies, and from these to deduce the German plans. The information obtained in this way threw what has been to me an entirely new light upon the campaign, and made clear what had previously been dark.

Much of what I have written about the Germans is necessarily conjectural, and therefore I make no claim to be writing history. But I believe that the positions I have ascribed to the German forces at

various dates are in the main accurate, and I must leave my readers to judge of the deductions which I have drawn from those movements.

I have found that the accounts published in Allied and neutral countries, owing to lack of information, do but scant justice to the part played by our original Expeditionary Force. Even such an authority as M. Hanotaux, in his excellent little book, *L'Énigme de Charleroi*, makes the fighting at Mons begin only at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on August 23, and says that such fighting as did take place was done by our First Corps, which was hardly engaged at all. I hope that what I have written here may at least have the effect of making clearer the influence which our operations had on the campaign as a whole.

For my account of the operations of the French Armies I am indebted chiefly to "Quatre Mois de Guerre," published in the official French *Bulletin des armées* for December 1914, to M. Hanotaux's *Histoire illustrée de la guerre*, and to his *L'Énigme de Charleroi*. My account of the operations of the Belgian Army is drawn from *L'Action de l'armée belge*, the official report of the Belgian General Staff, and from *The Invasion and the War in Belgium*, by Professor Leon van der Essen. To all of these I owe much valuable information as to the movements of the German armies. I have also to

express my indebtedness to my brother-in-law, Captain C. T. Atkinson, who has kindly read the proofs and made many valuable suggestions.

I have in my last chapter endeavoured to explain the strong and weak points in the German system of conducting war, and what we may learn from it to our advantage.

I must apologise for the fact that it has been necessary to limit the number of maps, and therefore I have to ask my readers in following the operations occasionally to refer both to the general map and to the maps of the battlefields.

F. MAURICE.

November 1918.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

THE GERMAN PLAN 1

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH PLAN 19

CHAPTER III

THE GERMAN MARCH THROUGH BELGIUM . . . 38

CHAPTER IV

NAMUR, DINANT, AND THE SAMBRE 57

CHAPTER V

MONS 72

CHAPTER VI

PURSUIT AND RETREAT 91

CHAPTER VII

PAGE
Von Kluck changes Direction 120

CHAPTER VIII

The Ourcq and the Marne 155

CHAPTER IX

The Higher Command in War 190

MAPS IN POCKET AT THE END OF THE BOOK

I. General Map of the Western Theatre of War, showing the original concentration of the opposing armies, and the marches of von Kluck's and of Sir John French's armies.

II. Battles of the Sambre, Mons, and Le Cateau.

III. The Battle of the Marne, September 5, 1914.

IV. The Battle of the Marne, September 9, 1914.

CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN PLAN

In the opening days of the war the opinion was general, both in Great Britain and in France, that Germany, having invaded Belgium and thereby compelled us, in defence of our honour, to take the field, had tilted against herself the balance of military power. The Dual Entente had never been considered to be conspicuously weaker in military power than the Triple Alliance, and when Italy refused to follow Germany and Austria into the field, and the clumsy diplomatists of Berlin had added the forces of Great Britain and Belgium to those of France and Russia, it was commonly held that Germany had overreached herself. When I landed at Havre on August 11, 1914, a French colonel who had come down to meet our party said to me, "Now that the British Army is coming the result is certain. This time the Germans have bitten off more than they can chew"; and this represented the common opinion of both armies

at the time. The news of the French invasion of Lorraine and of the stout resistance of Liège confirmed this view, and until the actual tidings of disaster arrived all seemed going well. It was then with amazement that the peoples of the Entente nations learned that the fortress of Namur had fallen in forty-eight hours and that the German armies were sweeping through Belgium and Northern France, everywhere in overwhelming numbers. It was with consternation that Great Britain heard the news, for which she was completely unprepared, that her little army, all but surrounded, was as good as lost and that Paris lay at the mercy of the enemy. Then, still more amazing, came the later news that the Germans were in full retreat, that Paris was saved, and that our men were advancing victoriously, taking prisoners and guns. How did our army escape? Why did not the Germans enter Paris? and why did they retreat? The answer has generally been —the miracle of the Marne. We owe much to Foch and the French soldiers of the Marne, but the Marne does not account for all, and to get as complete a reply to these questions as in the present state of our knowledge it is possible to give, to find out why the Germans failed of complete victory, and why they achieved as much as they did, we must look at events, as far as may be, from the

German side, see how their plans were laid and how they were carried through.

The basis of Germany's scheme of conquest, formed long before the war and put into execution in the autumn of 1914, was that she, holding a central position, would be opposed on the Western front by an enemy who could bring his forces quickly into the field and most quickly on the stretch of common frontier lying between Luxemburg and Switzerland, while on the Eastern front she would meet an enemy formidable in point of numbers, but slow and ponderous in his methods, and lacking means to develop rapidly his numerical strength.

From the days of Moltke onwards the German General Staff had studied deeply the problem of war on two fronts, and their studies had given them a very intimate knowledge of Russia's military strength, of which, as events proved, they had taken a more exact measure even than had Russia's own ally, France. Shortly after the South African War I paid a visit to Berlin, and there met the head of the Russian section of the German Great General Staff, an officer who, having been much in England, knew us well. He bemoaned the fact that he could never get his comrades on the General Staff either to understand or to take much interest in us. " There is no future in the English section,"

he said, " but I am very lucky where I am, because it is quite different as regards Russia. We have *got* to know Russia, for our existence depends on it, and you may be sure that we do."

The solution of the two-front problem, in the earliest stages, turned upon an accurate estimate of the amount of force required to hold Russia in check, with the aid of Austria, while the greatest possible strength was concentrated on the Western front in order to beat France quickly to her knees. Time was of the essence of the contract drawn by the German General Staff. To be sure of victory they needed a prompt and decisive success in the West, so that they could turn Eastwards before Russia was ready to strike with her whole power. In deciding on the methods they would employ to get these results they were greatly influenced by the events of the Russo-Japanese War, in which they found confirmation of their own pet theory of war. They assumed that the long-drawn-out battles in Manchuria made it clearer than ever that a direct attack against a front, no matter in what superiority of force it was made, must, owing to the delaying power of modern quick-firing weapons, and particularly of machine-guns, be a slow and costly business, and that decisive success could only be obtained quickly by envelopment.

Now the founder and trainer of the modern

German General Staff, the elder Moltke, had taught and practised the theory that the surest road to victory was that which led round the enemy's flank, and the greatest victories of 1870 had been won by envelopment in one form or another. This theory of envelopment was studied and examined by von Schlieffen, the predecessor, as the Kaiser's chief military adviser, of the younger Moltke, who was responsible for perfecting and carrying out the plan I am now describing. Von Schlieffen's problem was how to apply envelopment to war between nations in arms, how to get round millions where before it had been a question of outflanking two or three hundred thousand. Naturally he did not disclose his plan, but he developed in at least one treatise, which created a deep impression in military Germany, the theory that the only way to obtain decisive results quickly in modern war was to seek the enemy's flanks and roll them up, for quick results were Germany's special aim, a long-drawn-out war of exhaustion being abhorrent to her military philosophy. Von Schlieffen, who was much interested at the time in the events of the South African War, sent for me while I was in Berlin, and after asking me a number of questions ended by saying: "Well, you have found in your Roberts a general who understands envelopment, and that is why you succeeded." Von Schlieffen

was a very able man and a profound thinker, but his successor was little more than a well-trained German General Staff officer, with the advantages of a great name, a tactful manner, and the faculty of getting on with the Emperor. I am convinced that the secret of much that happened in the early phases of the war lies in the fact that an inherited theory, which had been elevated into a gospel, was applied by an individual of but ordinary capacity.

Having received the endorsement of the Emperor, the theory of envelopment was preached in the military text-books of Germany and practised sedulously at the German manœuvres, yet it was obviously out of the question to get round the large and highly trained armies which France could place quickly on the 150 miles of common frontier. If the armies of Germany were confined to such narrow limits, they would find that frontier manned by the French from end to end before they could reach it in sufficient strength to develop their attack. Therefore, if the theory of war in which the German General Staff had believed for years, the theory which they held to be confirmed by the lessons of recent wars and by the developments of modern armaments, if this theory was to be translated into practice, it was absolutely necessary that a way round should be found by violating the neutrality of Belgium and Luxem-

burg. No explanation of the invasion of Belgium which Germany has issued squares even superficially with the known facts, and on military grounds alone it is out of the question that what happened should have happened except as the result of deliberate, cold-blooded, and careful calculation. Honour and treaty obligations counted as nothing in the Prussian military mind where expediency appeared to point the way, and it does not appear to have taken the Prussian military mind long to convince the German political mind that its plan was the only safe one and that all questions of morality must go to the wall. No doubt Germany did not want to fight Belgium ; fighting a secondary foe meant waste of time, men, and material, and delay in getting at the chief enemy ; but she was quite determined to march through Belgium, and if Belgium refused to be terrorised into acquiescence, force would be necessary, so force was prepared.

The mobilisation of modern armies, even when their arrangements have been as perfected as were those of Germany, is a matter of time, and is a very intricate and complicated process, dependent upon the exact execution of a detailed programme which is easily deranged. Therefore, in order to be able to prepare their armies for war in security all the great Continental nations had for long been accustomed to keep on their frontiers considerable

forces of covering troops, so nearly mobilised as to be ready to take the field at a few hours' notice. There was not the least likelihood that Belgium would attempt to interfere with Germany's mobilisation, but if Belgium were to be foolish enough to resist it was before all things necessary that the advance of the mobilised armies should not be delayed by such resistance. Therefore one of the first items in Germany's programme was to arrange in peace time for a force of covering troops to be ready at very short notice to enter Belgium and clear the way for the armies that were to follow. The success of this plan depended on the rapid reduction of the Belgian fortresses on the Meuse, and in dealing with this problem the German General Staff showed that they were ahead of the rest of military Europe, in that they were the first to appreciate the possibilities of modern howitzer fire. Their early experiments in this direction did not aim at the rapid reduction of fortresses, but at the application of the howitzer and the high explosive shell to field warfare. For some time before the war they began to neglect their field guns, which in August 1914 were very inferior both to our own and to the French, and to develop the light and the medium howitzer. While they were doing this the advent of the aeroplane opened up to them new possibilities.

In the direction of artillery fire from the air they were again ahead of both the French and ourselves, and they were quick to grasp its effect, when applied to the use of heavy siege howitzers, upon the powers of resistance of modern fortresses. The Belgian fortresses consisted of a ring of detached forts, heavily armoured, and containing the fortress artillery. The Germans understood that these forts, the positions of which were accurately known and clearly marked on the maps, would be helpless against the fire of heavy howitzers from concealed positions unknown to the defenders. The one element that was wanted to make success certain was that the fire of these howitzers should be accurately observed, and this element was provided by the aeroplane.

I do not mean to imply that all this was as completely understood by the German General Staff before the war as it is to-day, for it is evident, from what happened at Liège, that they hoped to be able to reduce the place without waiting for the arrival of the siege artillery, but they did in fact have the right kind of weapon ready when the need arose, and appear to have formed a much truer estimate of the powers of resistance of the Belgian fortresses than did the soldiers of the Entente Powers.

Having found the means to overcome the

resistance of Belgium in the time available, if she should dare to oppose their military power, the German General Staff were able to complete their plans for the destruction of the French Army. They proposed to leave in the East to hold off the Russian armies with the help of Austria less than one-third of the total forces they would have available on mobilisation, while more than two-thirds were concentrated in the West. But force alone was not sufficient for the success of their plan. If they were to get a quick decision against the numerous and highly efficient armies of the French Republic, some element of surprise was necessary. Now the size of the German active army, that is the army kept under training in peace time, and the position of each of its corps were perfectly well known to the military world. There was therefore no great difficulty in calculating the time required to mobilise these corps and move them into position on the frontiers. It was also well known that Germany had a large surplus of trained men above those needed to bring the active corps up to their war strength, and that she had made arrangements to create out of these men a number of reserve formations; but it was not known how many these would be or how quickly they could be placed in the field. The German General Staff, in fact, knew that the French would

be uncertain both as to the number of German troops that would be left to watch Russia in the East, and as to the number of reserve corps which could be placed in the field in the opening phases of the war, and they proposed to use these elements of uncertainty to obtain the surprise which they desired, first by completing immediately the formation of a large number of reserve corps, and secondly, having in this way very considerably increased their available force, by bringing to the West a very high proportion of the whole.

Actually during the period with which my account deals, that is, during the first six weeks of the war, Germany placed on the Western front 21 active and 13 reserve corps, and followed these soon after with 4 more reserve corps. All these reserve corps were not ready at the same time, but the first 13 appeared in the field early enough to make it justifiable to include them in the original grouping of the German armies. Now, in considering this grouping the German General Staff were no doubt influenced by the facts that the arrangements of the French railways, and the location of the French corps in peace time, lent themselves to a rapid concentration of the main French forces on the Franco-German frontier, and they doubtless anticipated from this and from their knowledge of the French character that the

French would take the offensive into Alsace and Lorraine. It is also highly probable that they calculated that the French Government would be influenced by considerations of morality, and would not enter Belgium until invited to do so by the Government of that country.

In comparing the opposing forces it is most convenient to take divisions as the basis, because at the beginning of the war the division was approximately of the same size in all armies. The 21 active and the 13 reserve corps,[1] which the German General Staff proposed to deploy on the Western front, totalled 68 divisions—I am leaving cavalry divisions for the present out of account. They had to reckon that this force might be opposed by the little Belgian Army of 6 divisions, possibly by the English Expeditionary Force of 6 divisions, and the French Army of 45 active and 27 reserve divisions, or 84 divisions in all, while the French in addition were known to have a considerable number of Territorial troops. This on paper looks a formidable array to attempt to overwhelm quickly with a force of 68 divisions; but there were many factors which simplified the problem when it was examined more closely. In the first place the little Belgian Army stood alone and could

[1] A corps at this time normally consisted of 2 divisions, with other troops chiefly artillery.

not be supported in time either by France or by England, while it was beyond the bounds of probability that the Belgian Government would permit their army to abandon the country to its fate, and march at once to join the French armies. Therefore there was every reason to expect that it would be possible either to overwhelm the Belgian Army completely and quickly, or, at the worst, to lock it up in its fortresses, where it could be held by reserve formations while the main German armies were marching on France. If Great Britain intervened in the war, which was by no means certain to the German mind, she would be late in the field, because her troops had to be shipped across the Channel, and the British military system did not lend itself to very rapid mobilisation, while the plan of a great enveloping movement through Belgium would tend, when prolonged into France, to cut the communications between the Channel ports and the South and prevent the despatch of British reinforcements. Of the French Army at least 3 active divisions had to come from North Africa, and would probably be late, many of the reserve divisions would be required for fortress garrisons, and the Territorial troops were known to be lacking in artillery, and to be incompletely trained.

Such then were probably the chief considerations which the German General Staff had before them

when shaping their plan of campaign. They decided to draw up their armies on the Western front in two groups :[1] the first, which was to be the principal means of obtaining the quick decision they sought, along the Belgian frontier ; the second, which was to meet and counter the probable French invasion of Lorraine and pin the main French forces in the south, was to be formed on the southern frontier of Luxemburg and in Lorraine. These two groups were to be connected by a comparatively weak link, and a fourth, and also weak, group was to take post in the extreme south and watch the Vosges and Alsace. The first group, composed of the First, Second, and Third Armies under von Kluck, von Bülow, and von Hausen respectively, comprised no less than 16 corps (32 divisions) and a large force of cavalry, nearly one-half of the German forces in the West. The second group consisted of the Fifth and Sixth Armies, under the German Crown Prince and the Bavarian Crown Prince Rupprecht, and amounted to 12 corps (24 divisions). The connecting-link between the two groups was provided by the Fourth Army, under the Duke Albrecht of Würtemberg, who commanded 4 corps (8 divisions), and lastly, on the south, lay the Seventh Army under von Heeringen, with 2 corps (4 divisions) and some

[1] For the original grouping of the German armies see Map I.

reserve formations, and troops from the garrisons of Metz and Strassburg.

There were two dangers to which this distribution exposed the German forces. The first was that a French offensive into Alsace and Lorraine might overwhelm the weak left flank under von Heeringen and lead to the envelopment of the armies of the two Crown Princes from the south, the second was that the weak link between the two main groups might be snapped by a French attack in force upon it, and the flanks of either or both of these groups be assailed. In appreciating these risks they were most certainly guided by the principles I have already outlined. They would argue that both the danger points lay in difficult and highly defensible country, the Vosges on the south and the Ardennes in the centre, that in such country their machine-guns, which they had developed highly both in numbers and efficiency, would have great delaying power, and the French 75's, the crack weapon of their chief enemy, little scope. In fact they proposed to make skilful use of the nature of the country on the frontier so as to increase the weight of the blows they intended to deliver. The plan in the main hinged on the German belief that a frontal advance even against weak forces must be slow, and that therefore the armies of the two Crown Princes in the south

must make their weight felt before a French advance into the Vosges had got very far, and that the great enveloping movement through Belgium, the strength of which they trusted would not be anticipated by the French, would become effective before an attack on their centre could make enough progress to be dangerous.

The German plan was in conception bold, simple, and based upon a careful abstract study of war. It was at the same time utterly ruthless and immoral in its cold-blooded contempt of national pledges and of the rights of the weak, and was fundamentally defective in its disregard of the psychology both of potential enemies and of possible allies. It was, in fact, a *chef d'œuvre* of Prussian militarism naked and unashamed, and, like all plans which defy the laws of morality, it contained the germs of weakness which were to bring it to failure. For it made Great Britain a certain enemy, Italy a certain neutral, and turned against Germany the sentiment of the greater part of the civilised world. Had it been carried through in the field with the skill with which it had been drawn up in the offices of the Great General Staff, it might have encompassed the destruction of our first five divisions, the fall of Paris, and the occupation of Northern France, but even so great a measure of success would not have brought victory over

enemies who felt that life would not be worth living if such a plan and such methods were permitted to triumph. Luckily we were not put to so terrible a test, for though the plan was good its execution was faulty, and, as will be seen, adherence to one idea caused opportunity after opportunity to be missed.

I do not wish to suggest that it was in any sense a rigid plan, or that the direction and objective of the great enveloping movement was fixed at the time when the march into Belgium began. The Germans are too good soldiers to commit a stupidity of that kind. War, so far as concerns the higher command, is a conflict between minds, and each Headquarters can only guess what is going on in the other. The German Headquarters could only conjecture what the Belgian Army would do; they could only guess whether, if Great Britain came into the war, her army would come at once to the help of Belgium, or prolong the French left, or lie back behind it; they could only surmise how far north the French left would extend. Moltke had always taught that the preparation of a plan of campaign in detail should not be carried further than the first contact with the opposing troops, all beyond that depending upon the unforeseeable, the action of the enemy, who usually does what is least expected. In one of those flashes of humour which

very occasionally light up his valuable but portentously dull pronouncements, he once said to his staff in criticism of a military exercise: "Gentlemen, I have observed that there are always three courses open to the enemy, and that he usually takes the fourth." In that teaching the German General Staff of the present day has been brought up; but fortunately for the world the successors of the elder Moltke were not in 1914 of his calibre, and though their plan was flexible and adaptable to the changes and chances of war, the idea of envelopment had become with them such a fetish that it was for a time at least regarded consciously or subconsciously as an end in itself rather than as a means to the one end of operations of war—the decisive defeat of the enemy.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH PLAN

Though I propose to follow the course of events mainly from the German side my object is to make clearer the part played by our Expeditionary Force in the opening phase of the war, and for this it will be necessary from time to time to look at events both from our own and from the French point of view, and to examine the Allied scheme on the Western front as a whole. The French plan was, as might have been expected from the spirit and training of the French Army, offensive, the object being to carry the war into Germany as quickly as possible. Russian co-operation was assured, Italy had fallen out with the Triple Alliance, and, once it was known that English help was forthcoming, France had every reason to suppose that she would have sufficient force to carry through her plans, for there was no great disparity in strength between the active armies of France and Germany. To obtain an approach to equality France, with her much smaller population, had had to keep with the colours in peace time a higher proportion of her

manhood of military age than had her enemy, and the military superiority of Germany at the outbreak of war lay mainly in the mass of trained men who had passed through the ranks and were no longer in the active army. The French Headquarters could not know how the enemy would solve the two problems which would decide the strength of the armies to be mobilised against them. Neither France nor any of her Allies suspected that Germany would dare to concentrate so great a proportion of her total strength on the Western front, nor was the perfection to which Germany had brought her arrangements for mobilising rapidly her reserve formations appreciated; and these two factors had, as will be seen, very great influence on the early course of the war in the West. But this difficulty in gauging accurately the enemy's strength in the West was not the only handicap from which French Headquarters suffered.

Unlike the German, the French Government paid due respect to the rights of others, and therefore the French soldiers were limited in their plans of offence to direct attack across the German frontier between Metz and Switzerland, and a great envelopment, such as Germany carried through, was excluded on moral grounds. The French invasion of Alsace and Lorraine was not therefore, as has sometimes been said, a movement dictated

by sentimental and political considerations. It was the one alternative either to waiting passively for the enemy's attack, and exposing French territory to the ravages of war, without an effort to prevent such a disaster, or to outvying the enemy in immorality by transferring the scene of battle to the country of a weak and neutral power.

These factors governed the arrangements for the first grouping of the French Army, which was designed to be as follows:[1] an Alsace group of 5 divisions with 4 reserve divisions was to assemble about Belfort; along the Lorraine frontier south of Metz the main offensive group, consisting of the First Army of 4 corps (8 divisions) under General Dubail, and the Second Army of 5 corps (10 divisions) and 3 reserve divisions under General de Castelnau; the Third Army of 4 corps (8 divisions) and 3 reserve divisions under General Ruffey assembled round Verdun; the Fifth Army of 3 corps (6 divisions) and 3 reserve divisions under General de Lanrezac watched the exits of the Ardennes from Belgian Luxemburg as far north as the Belgian frontier near Rocroi; a Fourth Army of 4 corps (8 divisions) and 2 reserve divisions under General Langle de Cary was in reserve behind the centre. Thus Joffre had a total force for the field of 45 active and 15 reserve divisions. This

[1] This grouping of the French armies is shown on Map I.

grouping shows that the French Commander-in-Chief intended to employ, for an offensive across the Franco-German frontier, 30 out of his available 60 divisions, more than half his active troops being included in the 30, which could be readily reinforced from the Fourth Army in reserve. It also shows that he was prepared for the violation of the neutrality of Luxemburg, and of that part of Belgium south of the Meuse, but that he had not thought it probable that Germany would be strong enough to force the Meuse, brush aside the opposition of Belgium, and march through the plains of that country. The possibility of such an eventuality does not, however, appear to have been overlooked, for the position of the Fourth Army in reserve was such that it could be pushed forward into the Ardennes, so as to strike at the flank and communications of any German force attempting a wide turning movement by the north, while the Fifth Army took ground to its left, so as to meet the enemy if he advanced north of the Meuse.

When the first groupings of the opposing armies are compared, we get at once the key to the mentality of the French and German leaders, and to the principles which guided them. As might be expected, these principles were the outcome of special study of the particular problems which confronted each nation, and in each case they show the influ-

ence of national thought and character. Strategy is not an abstract science, concerned with the grouping and movements of pieces on a level board, but has to occupy itself with the political questions of the day, with a most minute and careful study of the topography of the theatre of war, with examination of the time in which troops can be moved from one area to another, both by friend and by foe, and, above all, it is a clash of human minds, each with at best a very imperfect knowledge of the problem of the other, and each dealing with men of flesh and blood, who have limited powers of endurance, and require to be fed, clothed, equipped, and provided with the means to enable them to fight in the best possible conditions.

Consideration of all these factors by the French and German General Staffs during the years which preceded the outbreak of war had led each of them to inculcate certain methods of procedure, which were sometimes labelled, erroneously, the French and German doctrines of war. They were not doctrines applicable to war in general, but solutions of the special problems of a war between the Central Powers and the Entente in Western Europe.

The Germans, as we have seen, required quick results, and they relied upon obtaining them by concentrating from the very outset superior numbers on those parts of the front where they wished to

obtain the decision, that is, particularly against the Allied left flank, and by the more rapid effect of attack by envelopment as compared with that of frontal attack. They had great confidence in the perfection of the training, organisation, and equipment of their armies, and in the capacity of their General Staff to deal promptly and accurately with the complicated problems of time and space which their plan of campaign involved. The General Staff had gained the concurrence of the statesmen in the plan, and left them to devise a plausible story which should soothe such conscience as the German people possessed, and if possible hoodwink the neutral world; and, as the first article in the creed of the German Governments had, since the days of Bismarck, been that victory covers all sins, while from the Kaiser downwards all were absolutely persuaded that their arms were invincible, there had been no difficulty in the application of the old maxim that policy and strategy should go hand in hand. The principle of the German General Staff was then (to use a phrase dear to the German soldier) to impose their will upon the enemy from the outset, to compel him to conform to their plans, and, by employing at once the greatest possible force upon one general scheme, to leave him no time for counter-manœuvre. The defects of the plan, which sprang from the innate conceit of the

Prussian mind, lay in the failure to grasp its effect upon certain or potential enemies and in its underestimate of the forces which it would bring into the field against Germany. The Prussian Junker in fact believed that Great Britain and Belgium would seize any excuse to avoid having to face the might of Germany. To these defects must be added a certain rigidity of thought, which long study of the problem of war against France upon one fixed principle had produced in the minds of the German leaders.

The French General Staff, limited by political conditions in their field of manœuvre, could not by any possibility use, as the Germans proposed to do, the whole of their available offensive power upon one prearranged plan, because there was no room on the stretch of frontier, much of it mountainous, between Basle and Metz, for the employment of such masses of troops. They had therefore to trust that the rapidity of mobilisation would enable them to forestall the enemy, and upset his concentration before it was complete; while a considerable body of troops was held in reserve as a mass of manœuvre, ready either to confirm and complete a success or to ward off any danger which might suddenly develop. It was not because they did not believe in envelopment that they did not attempt it, for Joffre did in fact bring about the

breakdown of the enemy's plans by enveloping one of the German flanks at the very first opportunity he had of carrying out such a manœuvre ; but because under the particular political and geographical conditions which confronted the French at the outbreak of the war envelopment was impossible. That this would be so had been long recognised by French students of war and particularly by Foch, who had taught the French Staff how to counter envelopment by a return to the Napoleonic principle of manœuvre with a general reserve. The French had therefore by force of circumstances adopted an opportunist policy, which sought rather to create occasions for the action of a reserve held back for the purpose of delivering a decisive blow at the right time and place, than to put the whole of their armies into line at once, each having from the first assigned to it a mission in accordance with a plan prepared before the enemy had been encountered.

So throughout the period of the war which I am about to describe we find Joffre, as soon as he has sent off his reserve upon some task, at once creating another, and continuously on the watch for opportunities, until at last the opportunity comes.

France declared war on the evening of August 3, and the next morning General Joffre announced this fact to his troops in the following order :—

War is declared. Italy has issued a declaration of her complete neutrality. Germany will endeavour, by spreading false information, to cause us to violate the neutrality of Belgium. All our troops are expressly forbidden, until orders to the contrary are issued, to enter Belgian or Swiss territory even with patrols or single horsemen. No flying is to take place over these territories.

Not until the evening of August 5, that is, after Germany had violated the neutrality of Belgium, and Belgium had appealed to the Allies for help, was the following order issued:

(1) French airships and aeroplanes are authorised to fly over Belgian territory. As, however, the Belgian troops had orders up till yesterday to fire at all aircraft, and orders to the contrary may not yet be known to all concerned, pilots are to be directed to fly high.

(2) Cavalry reconnaissances may also proceed into Belgian territory, but they are not yet to be supported by large detachments. . . .

(3) All parties entering Belgium are to be specially warned that they are entering the country of a friendly and Allied Power. They are not to carry out requisitions of any kind until the agreement with regard to these, which is in preparation, has been made known. They are only to make voluntary purchases against cash payments.

These orders do honour to the French Government, and display their anxiety to respect the rights and wishes of an Ally, and if anything were needed

to do so, they should suffice to bring France the sympathy and support of the civilised world, for this scrupulous respect for the code of national honour gave the unprincipled enemy an advantage from which he profited to the full. Had it been possible to make preparations earlier for obtaining information as to what was happening on the German-Belgian frontier, the surprise which the Germans sprang upon the Allies at the time of the battle of Mons would have been unmasked much sooner and the story of the war materially changed. As it was, the Germans had leisure to complete their arrangements for concealing their designs before the French Headquarters could get their means of investigation to work.

On August 7 [1] the French covering troops about Belfort moved forward into Alsace, and occupied Mulhausen on the 8th, but were unable to hold the town in face of superior German forces, and fell back the next day. By August 14 the First and Second Armies and the Alsace group were ready for the general advance, and Alsace and Lorraine were invaded in force. Mulhausen was again occupied, the outskirts of Colmar were reached, and patrols pushed forward towards the Rhine, while the main chain of the Vosges as far east as the Donon was secured. In Lorraine the First

[1] For these events see Map I.

and Second Armies fought their way forward against steadily increasing opposition, and on the 19th penetrated as far as Saarburg, cutting direct communication between Strassburg and Metz. But before the French main offensive had reached its full development events in the north had forced Joffre to divert troops from the south, and it was a weakened force which on the 20th met the Sixth and Seventh German Armies advancing to the attack, the enemy's main blow falling on their northern flank between Saarburg and Metz. Generals Dubail and de Castelnau were forced slowly back to positions covering Nancy and Lunéville, where we may leave them for the present to return to the events on the extreme left of the French line.

Here to the north of Sedan, on the frontier of Belgian Luxemburg, was placed in the first concentration General Sordet's cavalry corps of three divisions. This corps crossed the Belgian frontier on August 6, and advancing south of the Meuse on the 8th got to within a few miles of Liège, but without discovering any large bodies of German troops. The French cavalry then fell back again towards the frontier, and after a short rest carried out further reconnaissances between the 11th and the 15th through the Ardennes towards Neufchâteau, and north of the Meuse towards Namur and Charleroi. All these enterprises brought

only negative results. Eastern Belgium had been explored and no considerable German forces had been discovered on the move against the French left flank. The French Headquarters to that extent found confirmation of their views that such a movement was improbable. Sordet's expedition was in fact too early to find the German columns on the march, and his troopers could not get through far enough to discover and interrupt the enemy's concentrations. The German cavalry when met gave way, but did not allow their screen to be pierced, and the French horsemen found great difficulty in obtaining information in face of the rifle and machine-gun fire coming from the cyclists and Jägers brought up in motor lorries in support of the German cavalry.

This first experiment in cavalry reconnaissance on a large scale in the present war illustrates very clearly how easily the old eyes of the army can, in these days, be blinded by an enemy who knows how to make skilful use of rifles and machine-guns. The text-book opening of a great war which had fired the imagination of the Continental cavalryman proved to be a fiction. The French cavalry encountered no great masses of opposing horsemen, to be ridden down in thrilling charges. Instead they were met by rifle fire coming from they knew not where, fire to which with their

light carbines they could make no effective reply. Nor were the new eyes much more successful in clearing up the fog of war. The distances from their bases in France to the Meuse north of Huy, to which place, and to Liège still farther north, the German columns marched to cross the river, made it impossible for the French aircraft of those days to keep up regular and sustained reconnaissances of the roads along which the enemy was moving. The part of Belgium which lies east of the Meuse is densely wooded, and in particular the forests of the Ardennes formed an impenetrable screen to the eyes of the French airmen. Further, the enemy frequently took the precaution of marching his infantry by night.

It had been very generally supposed before the war that air reconnaissances would make surprise impossible, and that generals would find themselves in the happy position of no longer having to guess, like Wellington, at what was happening on the other side of the hill. In practice, however, human ingenuity usually arrives at some more or less effective antidote to every new development of science which is applied to war. Revolutions in warfare, which are sometimes announced as the necessary and immediate consequence of a startling invention, are in fact slow to mature. In the story which I am now telling of the first

six weeks of the war, will be found, successfully carried through, one by each side, two great surprises, each as dramatic and as far-reaching in its consequences as any to be found in military history.

There was nothing in this early exploration to shake the opinion of French Headquarters that the enemy was unlikely to advance in strength north of the valley of the Meuse, and it was not until August 15 that General Joffre received definite information that large German forces were moving westwards through Liège. He at once issued orders to strengthen his left, and to extend it northwards to meet the threatened enveloping movement of the enemy. The Fifth Army was ordered to move across the Belgian frontier into the angle formed by the Sambre and the Meuse between Charleroi, Namur, and Dinant, and it was reinforced by the Eighteenth Corps, which was withdrawn from the Second Army, then moving forward into Lorraine. The Second Army had also to give up the Ninth Corps, and the three divisions from North Africa, which were to have joined in the invasion of Alsace, were sent northwards. Thus the effect of the discovery that the enemy was in strength in the north was to reduce the main French striking force in the south by no fewer than seven divisions. The Fourth Army, which had been in reserve, was moved up

to the frontier of Belgian Luxemburg to take the place vacated by the Fifth Army and to connect that army with the Third. Lastly, as it was definitely known that a large force of German cavalry, estimated at three cavalry divisions at least, had crossed the Meuse and was moving westwards through Belgium, it was necessary to take precautions against raids into French Flanders, which the enemy might attempt, either in order to interfere with the concentration of the British Expeditionary Force then on its way, or even to interrupt communication between the Channel ports and the rest of France. General d'Amade was therefore sent to Arras to take command of a group of Territorial divisions consisting of the Eighty-fourth at Douai, the Eighty-second at Arras, and the Eighty-first about St. Omer. To this group was added in a few days' time the Eighty-eighth Territorial Division, which assembled south of Lille, while two reserve divisions from the garrison of Paris were placed under orders to move north to join General d'Amade's command. We shall meet most of these troops again during the retreat of the British Army from Mons.

These movements were not completed until August 21, and at that time French Headquarters were still unaware of the full strength which the enemy was bringing against them, and more

especially of the strength of the enemy's forces moving north of the Meuse through Belgium. General Joffre was far from renouncing all idea of attack. He had been forced to weaken his offensive in the south, but this was to be remedied by a blow in the north, and therefore his central reserve, the Fourth Army, was brought up towards the Ardennes, ready to strike if it were found that the enemy were moving in force north of the Meuse, while if the Germans were not in strength there the British would come in on the left of the Fifth Army and with it envelop the German right. The idea still prevailed that the Germans could not be strong enough to secure their centre in the Ardennes against attack and at the same time carry out a great attack upon the Allied left.

By August 20[1] the British Expeditionary Force of a cavalry division and 2 corps, each of 2 divisions, in all about 70,000 combatants, had completed its concentration just south of Maubeuge, and on the 21st began its march northward, the British cavalry advancing towards the Canal de Condé, to the east of Mons, and gaining touch with General Sordet's cavalry on its right. On August 22 the First and Second British Corps reached positions about Mons, the First Corps, on the right, being in touch with the left corps of

[1] For these movements see Map II.

General de Lanrezac's Fifth Army near Thuin, south-west of Charleroi. This left corps was the Eighteenth, which had entrained at Toul on receiving orders to leave the Second French Army, had detrained at Avesnes to the south of Maubeuge at the same time that the British were assembling, and had marched thence across the Belgian frontier towards Marchienne. Farther to the right about Charleroi lay the Third French Corps, while the Tenth Corps was disposed along the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur, and the First Corps on the line of the Meuse, between Namur and Dinant. The Tenth and Third Corps were by this time being reinforced each by one of the French divisions from North Africa. The First Corps expected a reserve division, the Fifty-first, which had not actually arrived, and two reserve divisions were on their way to join the Eighteenth Corps, these reinforcements bringing General de Lanrezac's Fifth Army up to a total of 280,000 men, but of these some 80,000 were not actually in place; so that about the time when the German blow first fell on the Franco-British left flank there were, exclusive of the garrison of Namur, 270,000 Franco-British troops in position between Dinant, Namur, and Mons, facing German armies which, as we shall see, totalled over 400,000 men. Even as late as August 22 the view held at French

Headquarters appears to have been that it would be possible to envelop the Germans north of the Meuse by an advance of the British Army and of the French Fifth Army pivoting on Namur, and it was with this general idea of an advance to be continued northwards into Belgium that our army marched to Mons on August 22.

On the morning of August 23 the two reserve divisions attached to the French Eighteenth Corps, the Fifty-third and the Sixty-ninth, reached the line Montignies—Jeumont, just north-east of Maubeuge and directly behind the point of junction of the French left and the British right. But by then the German surprise had already been sprung, the French Fifth Army had been heavily attacked, and a few hours later both General Joffre and Sir John French were for the first time aware of the imminent peril which menaced the Allied left wing. In order to make the extent of this surprise clear I cannot do better than quote Sir John French's first despatch. He says:[1]

At 6 A.M., on August 23, I assembled the commanders of the First and Second Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position and explained the general situation of the Allies, and what I understood

[1] *Naval and Military Dispatches relating to Operations in the War, September-October and November 1914.* London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1914, p. 19, para. 2.

to be General Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with perhaps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observations of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.

About 3 P.M. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack on the Mons line, apparently in some strength.

. . . . . .

The right of the Third Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient; and I directed the Commander of the Second Corps to be careful not to keep the troops too long on this salient, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark. In the meantime, about 5 P.M. I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps, viz. a reserve corps, the Fourth Corps and the Ninth Corps, were moving on my position in front, and that the Second Corps was engaged in a turning movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve French Divisions and the Fifth French Army on my right were retiring, the Germans having on the previous day gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur.

CHAPTER III

THE GERMAN MARCH THROUGH BELGIUM [1]

The three German armies destined for the attack on the Allied left flank were concentrated, the First, under von Kluck, about Aix-la-Chapelle, the Second, under von Bülow, about Malmedy and Stavelo, and the Third, under von Hausen, about Prüm. They were to move into Belgium, the First Army by Liège, the Second mainly through Huy and thence along the north bank of the Meuse upon Namur, the Third through the Ardennes by Marche on Dinant. Each army required several roads, but these places give the general direction of the line of march. Von Kluck's army, which was to be on the outside of the wheel, and was therefore intended to carry out the final envelopment, had the most difficult task and was considerably the strongest. It consisted of no less than seven corps (14 divisions), the Second, the Third, Third Reserve, Fourth, Fourth Reserve, Ninth, and Ninth Reserve, and three cavalry

[1] See Map I.

divisions, the Second, Fourth, and Ninth. Two of these corps, the Third Reserve and Ninth Reserve, were, as will be seen, left in Belgium for a time, but it is probable that at first at least they formed part of von Kluck's command. Two of the cavalry divisions, the Second and Fourth, formed a cavalry corps under the command of von Marwitz, and may possibly have been independent of von Kluck; but as they worked throughout in the closest touch with his army it is reasonable to consider them as under his orders.

As I explained in the first chapter, a very small proportion of the fighting strength of Germany was left on the Eastern frontier. Actually only four out of a total of twenty-five active corps were, with a number of reserve formations, to hold back the Russians till France had been defeated. It is necessary to keep this in mind in order to understand the early phases of the campaign in the West, throughout which the German General Staff had one eye on the East, and were gauging to a nicety the time available for the completion of their programme in France. Von Kluck's line of march was barred by the important fortress of Liège, and he had the longest way to go. Therefore not only was it of the first importance that he should be able to get through Liège as soon as possible, but the whole German plan of envelop-

ment depended upon getting early possession of the place, for within the circle of its forts lay the railway junction upon which centred the lines connecting Belgium and Northern France with Northern Germany, and without those railways the mass of troops assembling for the march round the Allied left could not be fed or furnished with the thousand-and-one things which an army must have if it is to keep the field.

It must for these reasons have been a grievous disappointment to the German command when Belgium stoutly refused them permission to march their troops through her territory, but it is abundantly clear from the course of events that they had drawn up plans long beforehand to meet the possibility of Belgian resistance to their demands. It was von Kluck's army that was to march through Liège, but many of his corps came from the East, and not only would it cause delay to wait for these to come up in order to attack the fortress, but it was very important to conceal the presence on the Western front of troops whose natural task would be to oppose the Russians. Therefore the duty of clearing the road for von Kluck fell upon covering troops from von Bülow's Second Army, which were drawn mainly from his Seventh and Tenth Corps. As these corps came from Westphalia and Hanover respectively, their presence on the

Western front would be expected by the enemy, and would not arouse any suspicions as to the real strength of the armies by which France was to be attacked.

War was declared by France on the evening of August 3, and early on the following day the German Second and Fourth Cavalry Divisions entered Belgium and crossed the Meuse at Visé to the north of Liège, overcoming the resistance of a Belgian detachment holding the bridge. They then proceeded to cover on the west the attack on Liège. Similarly to the south, along the valley of the Meuse and in the Ardennes, the Ninth, Fifth, and Guard Cavalry Divisions established a screen covering the concentration of the Second and Third Armies, and this screen was, with the assistance of armoured cars, infantry cyclists, and Jägers brought up in lorries, effectively established before the French cavalry were free to cross the Belgian frontier. While the cavalry were moving into position the infantry of the Seventh and Tenth Corps marched on Liège, and after a last vain attempt to open a road by persuasion, attacked and drove in the Belgian outposts. The next day, August 5, von Emmich, the commander of the attacking troops, attempted to carry the place by assault, and failed with very heavy loss.

Simultaneously with the attack on Liège, the

attack on the *moral* of the Belgian people was begun. It is not my purpose to describe in any detail the German campaign of frightfulness in Belgium—that has already been done authoritatively with the aid of many who were brought into direct contact with its horrors. The savagery with which it was conducted has been ascribed to such various causes as exasperation at the heavy losses suffered in the capture of Liège, the natural brutality of the German soldiery, and anger at the audacity of little Belgium in daring to resist the commands of the War Lord of Europe. All these very probably, indeed one may say certainly, contributed to the rage of lust and cruelty which swept over such parts of Belgium as lay on the track of the German columns, but I am convinced that the vast amount of evidence which has been collected admits of no other conclusion than that the inspiration came from above, and was as much part of the calculated and cold-blooded German plan as was the concentration on the frontier. It was, in fact, an element in the scheme to save the time which was so precious to the German General Staff, and to secure by terrorism, deliberately and scientifically applied to military purposes, the uninterrupted march of the main forces to their goal.

The first attack on Liège on the morning of August 5 had been carried out mainly by troops

of the Seventh Corps. The Belgian commandant, General Leman, had been reinforced by the Third Belgian Division shortly before the attack was delivered, and had entrenched and manned the intervals between the detached forts. Von Emmich in his haste had tried to carry these entrenchments in a rush after what is now recognised as a short and inadequate artillery bombardment. This rash experiment had proved very costly, but time was of more value than men's lives. Troops of the Tenth Corps arrived during the afternoon from the south-east, and about the same time the first of von Kluck's infantry, the men of the Ninth Corps, who had crossed the Meuse to the north of Liège in the neighbourhood of Visé, came down on the fortress from the north. With these additions to his strength, and with an increased amount of artillery at his disposal, von Emmich organised a fresh assault on a larger scale. During the late afternoon a bombardment was opened which continued until dark, and this was followed by a series of infantry attacks on the northern, eastern, and southern defences, which were pressed home throughout the night regardless of loss. By the morning of August 6 the German infantry had forced their way between two of the eastern forts, but the Belgians still held the villages between the circle of forts and the town, and the Germans were too exhausted to follow up

their success immediately. Thus it was not until the morning of August 7 that the town was entered, and before then the Third Belgian Division had evacuated the place, for General Leman, finding the Germans gradually encircling the fortress, and his defences pierced, ordered it away to join the Belgian Army, which was assembling behind the Gette, 30 miles west of Liège, in order that this division might not be involved in the capitulation which he saw was inevitable. At the same time he determined to hold the forts to the last, so as to prevent the Germans as long as possible from using the railways passing through Liège.

The first hasty infantry assaults had proved too costly to be repeated, and once the town was entered the task of reducing the forts was left to the howitzers. To open a road for the siege train, which did not arrive until the 11th, the concentrated fire of the heavy field howitzers was turned on the two easternmost forts immediately south of the Meuse, and these fell on the 9th and 10th. On the 12th the siege train began its work, and the steel and cement cupolas which protected the guns of the forts were in turn smashed by the German heavy high explosive shell. Fort Lencin, which barred the main line of railway connecting Liège with Brussels, held out until the 15th, and there the gallant Leman was captured after he had

been rendered senseless by the final explosion which destroyed the work.

The brave resistance of the forts of Liège sent a thrill of admiration throughout the countries of the Entente Powers, but the actual military effect of this resistance was greatly exaggerated, because it was not possible to appreciate at the time the skill with which the Germans, in making their plans for the attack upon the place, had reduced the delay it would cause them. From first to last the siege lasted twelve days, and during the greater part of this time the mobilisation and concentration of von Kluck's army was proceeding. Several of his corps, as I have pointed out, had to come from great distances, and it is improbable that his main bodies could have been ready to march across the frontier before the 12th at the earliest. It is not less than four marches from the neighbourhood of Aix-la-Chapelle to the river Gette, about halfway between Liège and Brussels, and von Kluck had actually reached this river in force on the evening of August 17. Had the road been open it is improbable that he could have been there more than two days earlier, for it is unlikely that he would have dared to approach the main Belgian force with partially mobilised troops, small as it was in comparison with his great army. Even if he had done so, it is certain that he would

have had to wait until his army was completely equipped and concentrated before marching southward against the left wing of the main Allied forces; so that, apart from the serious losses that the Germans suffered, the military effect of the resistance of Liège may be estimated at a delay to von Kluck's Army of forty-eight hours in reaching the battlefield of Mons.

This delay may appear very short and as hardly worth the sacrifices made by the brave defenders of the Belgian fortress, but, in fact, it was of priceless value. Had von Kluck's Army appeared north of Maubeuge two days earlier than it did, it is very possible that it would have caught the British Army and the French Fifth Army, which were, as we know, very incompletely informed as to its strength, much less prepared for battle than they were, and that neither would have been able to escape from disaster. At best they could only have retired immediately, without inflicting on the enemy the loss and delay which were later to give Joffre his opportunity. But this was not the only service which the defenders of Liège rendered to the cause of the Allies. The spectacle of a little army, partially trained and insufficiently equipped, standing up for King and country against the most powerful and perfect military machine of modern times was an inspiration to every soldier of the

Entente armies, and still more did the proud refusal of Belgium's King and people to admit that might is right, with the certainty before them of having to make such sacrifices for honour and faith as no nation in civilised times has been asked to endure, bring into the struggle against Germany moral forces which in her eagerness for immediate and material military results she despised and neglected. Even to-day Germany fails to grasp the effect on Great Britain of the violation of Belgian neutrality. The German people are deceived into believing that by the skill of their leaders and the valour of their troops a British attack on Germany through Belgium was just anticipated, and England's motive in entering the war is still held, not merely for purposes of propaganda, but in the mind of the German masses, to have been greed of gain and the annihilation of her chief commercial rival. The Hymn of Hate merely makes us smile, but it was a sincere expression of the popular conviction which yet prevails in Germany that England brought about the war for her own base ends,—so easy is it for an autocratic government to make its people think as they are told to think when it has drilled and disciplined them for generations. This failure to appreciate the psychology of her enemies is one of the weak spots in the German armour. It is responsible for the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the

shooting of Miss Cavell, the bombing of open towns, the bombarding of Paris, and other methods of "frightfulness," the only military effect of which has been to increase the number of Germany's enemies, and to steel their hearts to endure all in order to remove for all time this pest which threatens civilisation. Perfect in many respects as have been the planning and organisation of the German General Staff—and I am here making no attempt to conceal their good points — they have failed because they are incapable of grasping the fact that there are higher forces in war than the scientific application of physical power to the gaining of an immediate military advantage.

Before the last fort of Liège had fallen the Second and Fourth German Cavalry Divisions, which had been covering the siege on the west and south, set out to discover the strength and position of the Belgian Army, and attempted at the same time to secure the crossings over the Gette[1] for von Kluck's main bodies, which had completed their concentration round Aix-la-Chapelle. The Belgian forces watched the crossings of the Gette from near Diest, as far south as Jodoigne, with detachments from their main army, which lay between the Gette and the Dyle, and consisted of five infantry divisions, including the greater

[1] See Map I.

part of the reduced and sorely tried Third Division escaped from Liège, and a cavalry division. The remaining Belgian division, the Fourth, was posted at Namur and the crossings of the Meuse immediately below that fortress. On the 12th the German cavalry attacked the Belgians near Haelen, and after a sharp fight were repulsed, from which von Kluck must have gleaned that it would require infantry in force to drive back the little Belgian Army. He therefore made certain of being able to overcome any resistance he might meet with, and on the 17th approached the Gette with three corps, the Second, Fourth, and Ninth, flanked on the north by the Second and on the south by the Fourth Cavalry Division. The remaining active corps of his army, the Third, and his three reserve corps followed at no great distance. The German advanced guards attacked the line of the Gette early on the 18th, and in the course of the morning succeeded in forcing their way across on the Belgian left at Haelen and Diest. Farther to the south they met with greater opposition, and it was not until the evening that the whole line of the river was in von Kluck's hands. By then it had become abundantly clear to the Belgian Commander-in-Chief that he was face to face with an enemy in greatly superior numbers, that the German cavalry were working steadily round his flanks, and that no

French or British help could reach him in time to avert disaster if he held his ground. Sordet's cavalry had, indeed, appeared on the 18th near Gembloux, but had again been stopped by the rifle and machine-gun fire with which they had been received by the Jägers of von Kluck's cavalry corps, and had had to fall back without being able to gather any definite indications of the strength of the German forces. Left to itself the Belgian Army could only retreat or be overwhelmed, and it therefore withdrew behind the Dyle on the night of the 18th-19th, and on the morning of the 20th was within the circle of the outer forts of Antwerp.

Von Kluck's road being thus opened, he pressed his advance with all possible vigour.[1] The trail of blood and outrage left by the Germans in their progress through Belgium makes it a matter of no great difficulty to trace the march of many of their corps. On the 19th the Second Corps, after a short skirmish with a Belgian detachment covering the withdrawal of their army, passed through Aerschot and preceded and flanked by the Second Cavalry Division marched on to get round Brussels by the north and east of the Belgian capital. The Fourth Corps moved direct through Louvain on to Brussels, which it entered on the 20th, the Third Corps, on

[1] The marches of von Kluck's Corps are shown on Map I.

its left, passing through the southern suburbs of the town to gain the main road to Hal and Mons. The last of von Kluck's active corps, the Ninth, marched west from the Gette towards Braine l'Alleud. The three reserve corps of the First German Army were in second line, but the only indication of the routes they followed is that the Ninth Reserve Corps made itself for ever infamous by the sack of Louvain. It and the Third Reserve Corps were sent towards Antwerp to watch the Belgian Army, while von Kluck consummated his great wheel to the south, which was now beginning. The Fourth Reserve Corps appears to have entered Brussels and to have remained in and about the town probably until the other two reserve corps were established in their position round Antwerp, for it did not appear at Mons.

On the morning of August 21 the German plan of envelopment had taken definite shape, and all von Kluck's active corps were marching south-westwards from Brussels. The head of the Second was approaching Grammont, that of the Fourth was nearing Enghien, the Third Corps was passing through Hal, and the Ninth Braine l'Alleud. The march of the army was covered by the Fourth and Ninth Cavalry Divisions, which advanced towards the line of the canal which connects Charleroi, Mons, and Condé. The outer flank of the

wheel was covered by the Second Cavalry Division, which moved towards Ghent and Audenarde.

Von Bülow's Second Army had, while von Kluck was moving through and round Brussels, got into position. On August 12 his advanced troops had seized the only railway bridge which spans the Meuse between Namur and Liège, that at Huy, and begun to pass to the left bank of the river. Both this army and the Third, to its south, had to cross the Ardennes, and the Second Army, of which the Seventh and Tenth Corps must have been delayed by the operations at Liège, could only cross the Meuse at a few points; but as both armies had to wait upon von Kluck, who had much longer marches to make, these difficulties did not affect the perfect timing of the German deployment.

The morning of the 21st found the Second Army, with four and a half corps [1] north of the river, also moving in a generally south-westerly direction, on a rough arc extending from Genappe, where the right of the army was in touch with von Kluck's left, by Gembloux to within a few miles of Namur, which the Seventh Reserve Corps was approaching. At the same time the most northerly corps of the Third German Army, the Twelfth Saxon Corps, was

[1] It seems probable that at least half the Tenth Corps had been detained at Liège and had not come up.

marching through the Ardennes on Dinant. Thus, nine and a half German corps, covered by a large force of cavalry, were deployed on a front of seventy-five miles extending from Grammont on the right by Hal and Gembloux towards Dinant, ready to strike a concerted blow at the British Army and the French Fifth Army. On the morning of the 21st three of the corps of this French Army were moving into their positions on the Sambre and the Meuse, in the expectation of being able to continue their forward march and with the help of the British Army to come down on the flank of such German forces as were believed to be marching through Belgium north of the Meuse; but the remaining corps of this army, the Eighteenth, was still on the march northwards from Avesnes, and was a long way off, as were several of the reserve divisions. The British Army of two corps was leaving its billets to the south of Maubeuge, where it had assembled in glorious August weather, the men rejoicing in the friendly welcome of the French peasants and in the comparative comfort of the French billets, which contrasted very favourably with the damp bivouacs of our own autumn manœuvres, and marched forward towards Mons in complete and cheery ignorance of what fate had in store.

Thus, almost before they had fired a shot the

French and British armies on the left flank were compromised. The enemy had already won the initiative, because he had carried through remorselessly and without material change a carefully-thought-out plan, and by combining great skill with complete lack of scruple had succeeded in shrouding in mystery both his strength and his intentions. The French Headquarters had been compelled by circumstances which they could not control to change their plan at the last moment, and were not until a later date able to recover the loss of time this change involved. These first manœuvres for position had brought into real and practical conflict the principles of the two opposing schools of military thought, which had, as I have described, for many years before the war been engaged in paper controversy. In accordance with their theory of war the Germans had developed from the outset, and in the shortest possible time, the maximum of force which was to go relentlessly forward until the decisive battle, the goal of the whole vast manœuvre, had been fought and won. The numbers required to ensure that the decisive blow should have the necessary weight and strength had been obtained by a careful study of the characteristics of the enemy armies, and of the terrain upon which the opposing forces would first meet, by a bold acceptance of risk where no decision was

sought, and above all by surprise, the supreme weapon of generalship.

The French theory of war aimed, as I have said, at keeping in hand a considerable reserve, or mass of manœuvre, to be thrown into the conflict as occasion arose, either from the enemy's mistakes or from the success of other parts of the army. The enemy did make a mistake, and Joffre seized his opportunity, but not until the Germans had gained such a commanding position as could not wholly be wrested from them. The French Commander-in-Chief had to abandon his first project of offence, extend his left northwards, strengthen it by moving troops from his extreme right, throw his reserve immediately into the line, and set about creating a fresh mass of manœuvre. While all this was doing, the Germans were marching forward in agreement with their pre-arranged plan. The German General Staff had in effect out-manœuvred the Allies in the first deployment by a combination of treachery and skill.

On the critical left flank the Franco-British forces were coming into action piecemeal against an enemy not only in superior force but able to use his whole strength.

CHAPTER IV

NAMUR, DINANT, AND THE SAMBRE

The British Army and the French Fifth Army had assembled in the very area in which Napoleon had collected his forces for his last campaign: von Bülow's corps were marching to battle over the roads trodden in 1815 by Blücher's men; Condé, Turenne, William of Orange, Marlborough, Villars, and Wellington are amongst the great commanders who led their troops to war on these fields. The bridges over the Sambre, which the Fifth Army was guarding on the morning of August 21, 1914, had been forced by Napoleon's infantry, nearly one hundred years before, against the Prussians under Ziethen, and Wellington in Brussels hearing this news had sent out the orders which summoned the gallants of the British Army from the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball, and sent them marching to the field of Quatre Bras by the very routes taken by von Kluck's right columns. Quatre Bras and Ligny, where Napoleon overthrew Blücher, lay in sight of de Lanrezac's outposts on the Sambre,

and French troopers had passed over the field of Ramillies some miles to the north-east. Mons had been held by Wellington's men at the outset of the campaign of 1815, and now a British Army once more entering Belgium had crossed the field of Malplaquet on its march to Mons. Before battle was joined British cavalry patrols had penetrated northwards almost to within sight of Waterloo, and German horsemen flanking von Kluck's march had passed through Audenarde. The armies were closing on each other in the very centre of the cock-pit of Europe.

A great change had come over the face of the country since it had last seen British, French, and German troops locked in battle.[1] When Napoleon marched to the Sambre to open his last campaign he saw from the low hills which form the southern limit of the valley great stretches of open, rolling agricultural land, dotted with farming villages and woods, with here and there at the more important river-crossings a small town enclosed within the narrow limits of strong ramparts; a country of well-defined, broad-backed ridges and wide valleys watered by sluggish streams, a country in fact, abounding in the classic positions dear to the hearts of the writers of military text-books. The ground on which, in the third week of August

[1] The country here described is shown on Map II.

1914, the German armies were deploying for battle retained much of its old character, but a great part of the French and British forces found themselves taking up positions such as troops had never before been asked to hold in war, for the valley of the Sambre has been completely transformed by the industrial development of Southern Belgium. Around the little town of Charleroi now stretches north, east, and west a confusion of mines, blast-furnaces, and glassworks, connected by a network of cobbled streets and lanes, lined by close-packed, dull, uniform miners' cottages, between which rise tall chimneys, the headworks of mines, and great conical pyramids of smoking slack. Industry has added a new feature to the countryside in the form of a canal, which runs eastward, its waters black with slime and reeking of chemical refuse, from the Scheldt at Condé past Mons to a point a few miles north of Charleroi, where it dips sharply southwards to join the Sambre. West of the Charleroi Black Country, which extends almost without a break for twenty-six miles along the Sambre and the canal, the country resumes its open and agricultural character for a short interval beyond La Louvière and Binche. This disappears again, when Mons is reached, in another medley of mine-works, factories, and mining villages, ending still farther west along the Condé Canal

in an intricate area of small market gardens intersected by innumerable dykes, which drain the country and have converted the marshes of the Scheldt into rich productive land. Altogether it was as unfavourable an area for defensive battle as could well be found, for the free movement of the defenders was much hampered by enclosures of all kinds natural to a great industrial district, and the scope of their artillery was limited by the masses of factories and buildings which on many parts of the battlefield obstructed the view to the front. Not the least of the difficulties of the Allies was that the teeming population of the district, ignorant of what was afoot or not knowing whether to fly, swarmed in the narrow streets, affording admirable cover for the enemy's spies, who were doubtless busy among them, while later these unfortunates were to be driven helpless before the German attacking columns to shield them from the bullets of our men.

Neither the British nor the French had marched to this curious battlefield intending to fight there defensively or, indeed, at all. Both armies had on arrival covered their front with outposts preparatory to a farther advance northwards, which would bring them clear of the mining districts. Battle was forced upon them by an enemy who had forestalled them in preparation and gained the initiative.

The gradual wheel of the German forces through Belgium had on August 21 brought von Bülow nearer to the Allied forces than was von Kluck, and the Second German Army was consequently the first to become engaged. It will therefore be convenient to follow its operations before turning to those of the First German Army.

The pivot of the Allied position was Namur, a fortress covering the junction of the Meuse and the Sambre, designed on the same system of cupola forts as had been adopted for the defence of Liège. The experience of the attack on Liège had confirmed the Germans in their views of the effect of heavy howitzer fire upon permanent works, and with this knowledge it was neither necessary nor desirable to repeat the infantry assaults which had cost them so heavily in their first attempts to rush the Belgian fortifications. The siege artillery from Liège accompanied the infantry of von Bülow's Seventh Reserve Corps in its advance towards Namur, and was reinforced by still more formidable weapons. Austria had before the war gone ahead even of Germany in the development of heavy siege howitzers, and she had succeeded in perfecting one with a calibre of 42 centimetres (16 in.). A battery of these monsters, hastily borrowed by Germany from her Ally, reached

Cologne on August 15, and came into action against the Namur forts on August 22.

Meantime the German infantry had driven in the Belgian outposts and, without attempting further attack, took up entrenched positions covering the artillery. The siege howitzers at once began to pound the forts, while the field howitzers and guns bombarded the infantry entrenchments, which, as at Liège, had been thrown up in the intervals between the permanent works.

The garrison of Namur consisted of the Belgian fortress troops and the greater part of the Fourth Belgian Division, reinforced before the attack developed by some detachments which had been driven in from Huy, and later by three battalions of French infantry, bringing the total strength to over 30,000 men. This time the Belgian infantry had no chance of using their rifles, and had to endure the nerve-racking and demoralising experience of a prolonged and heavy bombardment to which no effective reply was possible; for the Belgian fortress guns were unable to discover the position of the enemy's howitzers, and the telephonic communication between the forts was very early destroyed, which made any systematic control of their fire impossible. This one-sided struggle did not last long. The forts were crushed in quick succession, and on the morning of the 23rd the

German infantry advanced to the attack, entered the town, and cut off a considerable part of the garrison. This rapid reduction of the fortress of Namur was a great blow to the Allied plans. The resistance of Liège had encouraged the hope that Namur, with the immediate support of the French Army, would be able to resist at least long enough to allow of the completion of the Franco-British concentration on the Allied left flank, to be followed at once by an offensive movement against the advancing enemy. Details of the attack on Liège were, of course, not obtainable, and it was not appreciated how short the resistance of its forts had been when once the German siege howitzers had come into action. It was the fate of Namur which gave the quietus to the system of defending fortresses with immobile guns in heavily armoured works.

While the final attack on Namur was in progress a fresh danger was developing against the right of the French Fifth Army. On the evening of the 22nd the advanced guards of the Twelfth Corps of von Hausen's Third German Army reached the Meuse at, and on either side of, Dinant, fifteen miles to the south of Namur. The Germans began the attack on Dinant early on the 23rd, and after a sharp struggle got possession of the town and crossed the river. The French defenders here,

the Fifty-first Reserve Division, had only arrived the evening before, and had relieved de Lanrezac's First Corps, which moved north to the battle-field of the Sambre, where it was badly needed. With Namur already in the enemy's hands, de Lanrezac could not neglect the fresh blow which threatened to cut his communications with the remaining French armies in the south, and he had no course but to order the First Corps back again to Dinant, where it arrived in time to carry out a brilliant counter-attack against the Twelfth Saxon Corps, the farther progress of which was thereby arrested for the time being. The Saxons had, however, as we shall see, played their part in forcing the withdrawal of a large French force at a critical moment from the battlefield in the north, and it is to this battlefield that we must now turn, leaving the Germans established on the Meuse by the evening of the 23rd at both Namur and Dinant.

While the Seventh Reserve Corps were preparing to attack Namur on the morning of the 21st, the remainder of von Bülow's Army was advancing to the Sambre from the north, its centre being directed on Charleroi. His corps came into action in succession from left to right, the wheel having brought the inner or left flank nearer to the river. Thus the Guard Corps moving from Gembloux was the first to become engaged, and

after driving in the French outposts which were north of the river, discovered that the crossings between Ham and Tamines were held in strength. An attack on the bridges was begun soon after mid-day, and by 2.30 P.M. the German Guards had got across the river and were in possession of Auvelais, and soon after of Tamines. Here they were fiercely counter-attacked by the French, but, being constantly reinforced, not only held their own but were able to make farther progress towards dusk, and by 9.30 P.M. were in possession of the village of Arsimont, which lies two miles south of the river. Meanwhile on their right the Tenth Corps,[1] passing through Ligny, worked its way through the mining villages to the north of Charleroi, and beginning late in the afternoon an attack on the bridges to the east of the town, had by dusk established itself to the south of the river. Still farther to the west the Seventh Corps moving south from Genappe crossed the canal to the east of Courcelles, and its advanced guard came into contact with French cavalry (Sordet's corps), which in the evening it pushed back to the main

[1] Being uncertain as to how much of the Tenth Active Corps took part in these battles and how much of this fighting was done by the Tenth Reserve Corps, I refer to the German troops on this part of the battle-front as the Tenth Corps, but it appears probable that part at least of both corps were engaged. The Germans claim that von Bülow's Second Army was not complete at this period, as all his troops had not come up from Liège.

Charleroi—Mons road. Thus by dark on the 21st von Bülow had obtained possession of the crossings of the Sambre as far west as Charleroi, and was in a position to deploy for attack south of the river, against the French who were known to be in strength.

This day had been one of preliminaries, the German advanced guards fighting their way forward against the French outposts, to gain room for the columns closing on the river from the north. Both sides had from time to time reinforced their covering troops in the struggle to gain or hold some important passage across the river, but neither von Bülow nor de Lanrezac had engaged their main bodies. Yet in these preliminaries the Germans had gained very real advantages, for though the French forces south of the Sambre were at least equal in numbers to those which von Bülow was bringing to the attack, the German troops were so placed as to give them superiority at the outset. De Lanrezac was, in fact, compelled to accept battle at a time when he was preparing for an advance across the Sambre, to begin forty-eight hours later, and a considerable part of his army was still on the march to the battle-field. The Germans were already reaping the benefit of surprise, they had gained the initiative, thrown the French on the defensive, and had their troops

so placed that the whole could be used together in one concerted plan of attack. It was in these conditions that battle was joined in earnest next day.

At dawn on the 22nd the troops of the Guard Corps south of the river were heavily attacked by the French, who regained possession of Arsimont, and fierce fighting ensued in this part of the valley of the Sambre, but as battery after battery of the Guard artillery came into action, and more infantry were pushed across the river, the Germans, despite very heavy losses, were able to force the French back by the close of the day to the main ridge overlooking the Sambre valley, between Fosse and Gougnies. Simultaneously with this struggle of the Guard Corps, the Tenth Corps were heavily engaged to the south of Charleroi, and gaining ground in spite of repeated French counter-attacks, which made their advance slow and costly, they had, ere the light failed, established themselves four miles to the south of the river, and were in line with the Guards on the right. The Seventh Corps, advancing west of Charleroi after a stiff fight at Anderlues in the evening, discovered French infantry holding the Sambre in force on either side of Thuin. This was the French Eighteenth Corps which had come up the evening before, but its two reserve divisions, which were to fill the gap

between its left and the British Army, were still a day's march to the south.

The 22nd had proved a hard but, on the whole, a successful day for the Germans. The battle was far from decided, but von Bülow had placed the whole of his corps on an east and west line, running about four miles south of Charleroi, had fought his way clear of the industrial districts, and now had beyond the river room and positions which would allow him to make full use of his superiority in artillery.

General de Lanrezac's view of the situation on the evening of this day was :

My opinion is that the enemy has not yet shown any numerical superiority, though he has perhaps considerable forces in the vicinity. The Fifth Army is shaken as the result of the battle, but is still intact. If it has suffered heavy losses it has also inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Having now been withdrawn into more open country, where the artillery of the army, which is still intact, can act effectively, the army should be able to bring the Germans to a stand. Our troops, by defending every yard of ground, can gain time to reorganise, and will shortly be in a position to counter-attack.[1]

At the time when he wrote this General de Lanrezac's Eighteenth Corps had come up on his left, and had hardly fired a shot, its two reserve

[1] Hanotaux, vol. v. p. 289.

divisions were still on the march to the front, while his First Corps had just been relieved on the Meuse, and was now available to take part in the battle. The brunt of the fighting had been borne by two of his corps only, the Tenth and Third, and these in his own words though shaken were intact. The British Army had just reached its positions about Mons, and was quite fresh. The strength neither of von Kluck's army now coming down on the Mons canal from the north, nor of Von Hausen's army about to debouch from the Ardennes against Dinant, was yet suspected by General de Lanrezac. Therefore, although the German successes gained on the 22nd were disquieting, there was nothing in the information available as to the military situation to cause the Allies any real anxiety.

The early hours of the 23rd were spent by von Plattenberg, the commander of the German Guards, in reorganising his corps after the severe fighting of the day before, and preparing to attack the French, who were discovered to have fallen back during the night to a fresh position on either side of Mettet, five miles south of the Fosse ridge. His artillery had already started the preliminary bombardment when he was informed of the advance of a large French force on his left flank, and he had to break off his preparations for attack

to meet this new enemy. This was the First French Corps, which, as we know, had handed over the defence of the Meuse about Dinant to the Fifty-first Reserve Division, and now made its first appearance on the Sambre battle-field. Unfortunately at this time news arrvied in quick succession at General de Lanrezac's headquarters of the fall of Namur and of the capture of Dinant by the Twelfth Saxon Corps. The First Corps had to turn about at once and march back to the Meuse to save the right flank and communications of the French Fifth Army from the danger which threatened them. Had the French First Corps, which had not been engaged, been able to come down at this decisive moment on the flank of the German Guards, the result of the battle of the Sambre might have been very different; and without in any way reflecting on General de Lanrezac, who, in the circumstances was compelled to provide for the safety of his right and rear, one cannot but recall that ninety-nine years before, on a field of battle a few miles to the north, there occurred a somewhat similar incident which vitally affected the fate of a campaign. Then the French were attacking the Prussians at Ligny, and d'Erlon's corps, marching and counter-marching between the fields of Ligny and Quatre Bras, was lost to Napoleon at a time when its aid might have allowed

the Emperor to inflict on Blücher such a defeat as would have made it impossible for the Prussians to appear at Waterloo.

Von Plattenberg, relieved of any further anxieties as to his left, renewed his preparations for attack on the French positions about Mettet, which he carried before dark. To the south of Charleroi the Tenth Corps was engaged throughout the day in a fierce struggle with the French Third Corps about Malines, and had by dusk overcome its resistance and compelled it to retire on Walcourt, a village on the latitude of Maubeuge and eighteen miles to the east of the French fortress. Simultaneously the Seventh Corps attacked the French Eighteenth Corps on the front Gozée—Thuin—Lobbes, and after prolonged and fierce fighting carried all these places. The Eighteenth Corps, finding its right flank exposed by the retirement of the Third Corps, was in its turn compelled to fall back. At nightfall on the 23rd General de Lanrezac was then in the position that his front everywhere had been driven in, his flank was threatened by the fall of Namur and by the appearance of the German Third Army at Dinant, and he had received information that the British Army was being attacked by three German corps, while a fourth was working round its left flank. This information was accompanied by an order to him

to send off General Sordet's cavalry corps at once to the British left to prevent the threatened envelopment. In these circumstances General de Lanrezac ordered a general retirement, which took with it the two reserve divisions, the 53rd and 69th, coming up on the British right.

With this we may leave von Bülow's Second Army and the French Fifth Army opposed to it, and turn to von Kluck and the British Army, but it is important to remember, if the situation of the British Army at Mons is to be appreciated, that by the evening of the 21st, when the British were still on the march northwards, the Germans were already across the Sambre at and east of Charleroi; that by the morning of the 23rd, when the battle of Mons opened, they were established some seven miles to the south of Charleroi, and were therefore even then to the south of the British right flank; and that at dawn on the 24th, before we had begun to withdraw from Mons, the French Fifth Army had been for some twelve hours in retreat.

CHAPTER V

MONS [1]

We left von Kluck's army on the forenoon of the 21st marching south-west from Brussels by the roads running through Grammont—Enghein—Hal and Braine l'Alleud, covered in front and on his right flank by three cavalry divisions. The day's marches were completed without incident, but early on the 22nd the British and German cavalry came into conflict, particularly to the north-east and east of Mons, and between La Louvière and Binche. The German cavalry now experienced the same difficulties as had confronted Sordet's horsemen in obtaining information as to what was going on behind the mounted screen, for the British horsemen, though not supported as were the German cavalry by armoured cars and infantry transported in lorries, had since the South African War been armed with the infantry rifle, and were easily first of the cavalries of Europe in dismounted

[1] See Map II.

work. The Uhlans got little beyond considerable losses from their morning's work, and it was not until late afternoon, when the British cavalry were withdrawn, that the Germans discovered that their enemy was in force at and to the west of Mons, and on a front running south-east from that town. The First and Second British Corps had by then arrived and taken up outpost positions, the line of the First Corps, under Sir Douglas Haig, extending from near Peissant, about five miles west of the left of the French Eighteenth Corps which was near Lobbes, to Harmignies, four miles south-east of Mons; that of the Second Corps, under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, running thence east of Mons to the canal at Obourg, and then westward along the canal to Pommerœul. Here the line was extended next morning westwards to the Scheldt by the cavalry division, which had been moved during the evening from the right flank to the extreme left, where it arrived late at night.

Von Kluck's Army had continued its march forward, still in a south-westerly direction, and on the evening of the 22nd appears to have been placed as follows: the Fourth and Ninth Cavalry Divisions were spread out along the British front, the Second Cavalry Division, which had sent patrols far to the west in the direction of Courtrai and Lille, had stronger bodies south-

west and west of Ath about Peruwelz and Tournai: the left corps of the army, the Ninth, had halted on the road from Nivelles to La Louvière with its head near the canal: the Third Corps was along the main Brussels—Mons road, with its leading troops to the south of Soignies, while the Fourth Corps moving from Enghien, reached the Mons—Ath railway about halfway between those places. On the right the Second Corps was along the Lessines —Ath road, with its head just south of the latter place.

Von Kluck's troops had come far and fast, the Second Corps on the outer flank of the sweep having marched 150 miles in eleven days, which for a body of troops of such a size is a remarkable achievement in the early days of a campaign, when boots and equipment are new, and reservists, fresh from civil life, are in the ranks. The British reservists had found the marches to Mons in the sultry August weather and their first acquaintance with the cobbled roads of Belgium trying, and the Germans must have had similar experiences, though not to the same extent, for they had a much smaller number of reservists in the ranks of their battalions than we had, and their men had for the most part been a shorter time away from active training. A Continental army in time of peace in the month of August has just completed the training of the

year's batch of recruits, and then requires comparatively few reservists to raise it to its war strength, which is one of the main reasons why the late summer has seen the outbreak of most Continental wars in recent history, and why this season has always been the danger period in times of European tension. The necessity for keeping up our foreign garrisons having long turned our Army at home into a feeder for the Army abroad, it was in consequence normally below strength, and contained a large number of young recruits, who, not being qualified either by age or training to take the field, had to be left at the depots on mobilisation. For these reasons the British infantry at Mons contained a far higher proportion of men returned from civil life than did von Kluck's army,[1] and the majority of them had completed their military training in the battalions abroad and did not know either their officers or non-commissioned officers. On the other hand, they were mostly men who had served for seven years as against the German infantryman's two, and the British infantryman had received, since the Boer War, more and better training in the use of the rifle than the foot-soldier of any other Army, a training which was to bear good fruit in the coming battle.

[1] In most of our battalions at Mons the reservists numbered 50 per cent of the total strength and in some cases 70 per cent.

When day broke on August 23 von Kluck had four active corps and three cavalry divisions of nine brigades, or about 160,000 men and 600 guns, within striking distance of the British force of two corps and five cavalry brigades, that is, about 70,000 men and 300 guns, and his neighbour von Bülow had for two days been engaged successfully with the French Fifth Army, which had been pushed back some way south of the Sambre, between Namur and Charleroi. Doubtless, if von Kluck had known the British strength at this time he would not have acted as he did, but if our mobilisation had been delayed (it did not in fact begin till four days after that of the French Army), once it was ordered the arrangements for the organisation, transhipment, and concentration in France of the British Expeditionary Force were carried out with remarkable secrecy and swiftness. Von Kluck may therefore have been in some doubt as to the strength of the forces opposed to him, and he probably was in no less uncertainty as to the position the British were holding, and more particularly how far their left flank extended. This knowledge was of special importance to him, for his task being to envelop the Allied left, he had to find out where that left was in order to get round it. As the British cavalry had been engaged with his troops to the east of Mons throughout the day,

and did not reach their position on the left of the British line till long after dark, it is almost certain that the Germans must have been in ignorance of this movement until after their plans for the 23rd had been formed. Further, the German troops had been moving continuously since their fight on the Gette on August 18, and must therefore have been strung out in their marching columns for miles along the roads behind the places I have indicated as reached by the heads of the various corps. It would, in such circumstances, be a matter of time for von Kluck to close up his troops, deploy for battle, and deliver a concerted blow in overwhelming force against the enemy who apparently lay at his mercy. The Third Corps to the south of Soignies lay within five miles of the British outposts north of Mons, the Fourth Corps, on its right, was rather farther off, while the heads of the two flank corps, the Ninth on the left and the Second on the right, were between ten and twelve miles from the British positions.

Von Bülow had, it will be remembered, begun his attack on the French Fifth Army by bringing his corps into battle in succession from left to right; but they were so placed before he began to fight that he was sure of being able to keep up a steadily increasing pressure on his enemy. Von Kluck, on the other hand, had half his army

at such a distance from the battle-field that it could hardly come into action before the evening of the 23rd, and yet without waiting to marshal his troops he flung those nearest his enemy into battle. Possibly he under-estimated the capabilities of the British force, for the German soldier had been wont to speak with contempt of our mercenaries, his favourite name for our Old Army, and our military reputation had not been enhanced by the story of the South African War, which was very imperfectly understood in the Fatherland; possibly he feared that we would run away from him at once, and was therefore anxious to come to grips at the earliest possible moment. Be that as it may, his only plan seems to have been to attack with his Third Corps, which was nearest to Mons, and to extend the battle front as soon as might be with the Fourth Corps, while the two flank corps continued to march forward in the general direction they had followed hitherto.

The early hours of the 23rd were spent in completing the defective reconnaissances of the day before, and the German cavalry were busy tapping at the British outposts along the whole front. The battle opened in earnest about 10.30 A.M. with a bombardment of some batteries of the Third Corps which came into action on a ridge to the north of Obourg, and from that time onwards the line of

guns was gradually extended westwards as battery after battery, first of the Third Corps and then of the Fourth Corps, came into action, until by 1 P.M. the Germans had established a great superiority in artillery along the front of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's corps. Under the cover of this bombardment the infantry of the Third Corps began soon after 11 A.M. an attack in mass on the loop of the canal to the north of Mons. This was the first occasion in which the corps had met modern rifle-fire, for it had not been engaged either in the assault on Liège or with the Belgian Army on the Gette, and it came forward to within close range of our rifles in the column formations preceded by skirmishers, which had often been noted by British observers of the German manœuvres, who, with memories of the South African War fresh in their minds, had speculated as to what would happen if such tactics were employed against us. Now the day had come, and as had been expected the dense columns of German infantry made an easy target for the rapid and accurate fire of the British riflemen, and our artillery, though impeded in finding positions on a great part of the front of our Second Corps by the mass of buildings and slag-heaps south of Mons, and overweighted by the numbers and power of the German guns, nevertheless succeeded for the most part in supporting their

infantry comrades effectually. It was, therefore, not until the Germans had crossed the canal to the east of Obourg, where it was not defended, and began, in conjunction with their troops to the north of the canal, a converging attack on Mons from the north and east, that the British were gradually pushed back on to and south-east of the town. The one complaint of our men was that they could not shoot fast enough to keep down the grey masses which surged against them, and yet they shot so fast that they could not touch the breeches of their rifles, and some of the German reports say that we had lined the canal with masses of machine-guns, a weapon with which we were peculiarly ill-provided.

This attack of the Third Corps had been made chiefly against the British Third Division, whose commander, General Hubert Hamilton, had prepared a main position to the south of Mons connecting with the left of Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps, near Harmignies, and it was to this position that the infantry defending the canal were withdrawn by order, fighting desperately hard to the east of Mons, where the German attack, unhampered by buildings and enclosures, was made in great strength, but not pressed to the immediate west of the town. The infantry of the Third Corps, taught by heavy losses to respect the British rifle fire, felt

their way cautiously forward through the town of Mons, and the mining villages to the west of it, and did not come into touch with the main British position until dusk, when they contented themselves with putting out outposts and restoring order after the losses and confusion of the day's fighting.

Farther west along the canal the attacks of the extreme right of the Third Corps and of the Fourth Corps, which had rather farther to go to reach the battle-field, developed somewhat later than the attack on Mons itself, and were, if anything, less successful, despite the great superiority of the German artillery. Less than half of the infantry of Sir Charles Ferguson's Fifth Division met these attacks, and was able to hold the general line of the canal until dusk, when it, like the Third Division, was withdrawn to an entrenched position in rear. Still farther to the west Allenby's cavalry, supported later in the day by the 19th Infantry Brigade,[1] beat off all attempts to cross the canal without much difficulty.

The Ninth German Corps, on von Kluck's left, seems to have made a leisurely march to the battle-field, and perhaps spent the day in closing up its columns preparatory to attacking the next day. In any event little more than its advanced guard

[1] The 19th Infantry Brigade was made up from battalions sent out for duty on the lines of communication.

became engaged partly with the right of the Third Division and partly with Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps, which had a comparatively quiet day as far as fighting was concerned.

This, then, is a bare outline of the events of the first day's fighting at Mons, and it is not easy to disentangle from it any clear-cut German plan of battle. It seems that von Kluck, being unaware how far the British left extended, thought that his Fourth Corps by continuing its march south-westwards would overlap his enemy's flank, and on that understanding allowed his Third Corps to press in at once. Then finding himself committed to a direct frontal attack, which was costing him very heavy losses, he appears later in the day to have ordered his Third and Fourth Corps to hold the British until he could bring his two outer corps down on their flanks and annihilate them. If this is the case his manœuvre was slow and cumbrous, and he failed to take advantage of the chances open to him. Sir John French, as he says in his Mons despatch, had not expected to be attacked by more than one or, at the most, two corps, with perhaps one cavalry division, and it was not until 5 P.M. that he was aware of von Kluck's strength.

Two of his divisions, Smith-Dorrien's Third and Fifth, had, in fact, been attacked throughout the

day by two corps and two cavalry divisions, which had only succeeded in driving back the British from their outpost positions, at a cost quite disproportionate to the losses of the defenders; while two more German corps and a third cavalry division had been within reach of the battle-field, but had not taken any real part in the struggle. The Ninth Corps had, as we have seen, got into touch with the Third Division and with Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps, but had done nothing more; the Second Corps appears to have continued its march from Ath on the Valenciennes road, its advanced guard coming into action in the evening on the canal near Condé. Had von Kluck been able to press his attack on the evening of the 23rd the fate of the little British Army might have been very different. By then the right of our Third Division south-east of Mons was in a position of some difficulty owing to the fact that the enemy had penetrated through the town, and the withdrawal of this division to its main position having taken place earlier than that of the Fifth Division, a gap was for some time left in the centre of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's corps, which gap was actually penetrated by small parties of Germans. It was closed soon after dark, but till then there had certainly been critical moments.

Without more knowledge than we possess as

yet of the state of von Kluck's corps on the evening of this first day of the battle of Mons, criticism of his action at that time can only be guess-work, but there can be but little doubt that, if the Third Corps had continued to advance south-east of Mons and had simultaneously exploited the gap between our Third and Fifth Divisions, while the Fourth Corps pressed the Fifth Division and the Ninth and Second Corps began attacks on the British flanks, ordered retreat would have become impossible. It may be that the Third and Fourth Corps had had such a bellyful of British musketry that they were incapable of further effort, and that the Second and Ninth Corps were wearied with marching, and so strung out along the roads as to make it impossible to bring them into battle; but from what happened next day it appears certain that a considerable part of the infantry of the Fourth Corps, as well as the whole or almost the whole of the Ninth and Second Corps, were not employed on the 23rd. It does not speak well for von Kluck's generalship if he approached us with his force so scattered that he could not make use of his strength and exhausted a part of his force before the remainder could become engaged, for both his cavalry and his aeroplanes must have given him timely notice of our presence. As to the effect of our rifle fire in the battle we have not

only the evidence of our own men as to the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy, but a letter found on a German officer captured by the French, and printed by them, is very much to the point; it runs:

We have already left Belgium several days, after having fought and beaten the Belgians at Tirlemont, and the British at Mons. The principal tactics of the English consist in entrenching themselves in villages and in opening murderous rifle and machine-gun fire. So we only advance against them with artillery, and reduce these wasps' nests with the fire of our guns. We have too heavy losses if we attack these positions with infantry, because our infantry marches like Blücher.

This letter was written about a week after the battle of Mons, and the change in the German tactics to which it refers almost certainly took place in consequence of the experiences of the German infantry on August 23. It is probable, as I have said, that von Kluck, finding that his first plan was producing a frontal attack in which his infantry was making little progress at very heavy cost, changed his plan during the course of the battle, and checking his Third and Fourth Corps in the afternoon decided to wait for the attack upon the flanks of the British by his two remaining corps, which had not then been engaged. The German general's action in this battle may be judged by his conduct later when he was faced by

somewhat similar circumstances, and from this it appears that he was a man of one idea. He saw in envelopment the one road to victory, and this was but the first of a number of opportunities which he let slip because he could think of battle in no other way.

Von Kluck had the extraordinary good fortune to bring to action an enemy very inferior in numbers and completely ignorant of the extent of this inferiority, and it was an occasion for a bold and comprehensive plan. But he seems to have made the mistakes, first of attacking before he was ready and thereby failing to employ sufficient force at the outset to make complete success certain, and next of relying on the slow process of envelopment by troops at a distance from the enemy, at a time when it was a question of seizing a chance which might disappear. In the morning when he began the battle he struck with no considerable preponderance of strength; in the evening he had in immediate touch with Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's two divisions more than sufficient force to overwhelm them, and it is to the undying glory of the infantry of the Old Army that by that time they had taken the sting out of such of the First Army as had attacked them, and had inspired the German commander with such respect that he was afraid to try for complete victory until the

chance had slipped away. Up to 5 P.M. von Kluck had the advantage of surprise and was unable to make use of it. After 5 P.M. the surprise was gone and his hand was exposed, for by then Sir John French had received Joffre's message informing him of the strength of the German First Army, and of the retreat of the French Fifth Army.

In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, and the British Commander-in-Chief, once aware of the trap, took steps to escape from it before it was sprung, and during the night issued orders for a retreat on Bavai to the west of Maubeuge. These orders came as a shock to the British troops, who had on the whole every reason to be satisfied with their day's work. They were quite unaware of the danger which threatened them or of the fate of the French Fifth Army, but they knew that the enemy had suffered terrible losses, that their main positions were intact, and that in their first battle with the world's most famous soldiers they had more than held their own. The First Corps had had some hard marching to reach the battle-field, followed by long spells of entrenching, but the bulk of its infantry had not fired a shot, and was dismayed at the idea of retreating without a fight. Of the Second Corps a part of the Third Division had been highly tried in the Mons salient, but the remainder had been nowhere hard pressed,

while the cavalry, as the result of their first encounters with the enemy, were firmly convinced of their superiority, either on horseback or on foot. The Army was, in fact, ready and eager to renew the battle where it stood. A retreat is at any time a depressing experience, but it is doubly depressing to troops who, proudly conscious that they can beat the enemy on anything like fair terms, can see no reason for it in what has happened within their view, and are forced to surmise that something somewhere has gone wrong and that some vague danger is threatening from some unknown direction.

By the time when the orders for retreat reached the British divisions the French Fifth Army was already a day's march to the rear of the British right. On the British left General d'Amade's force of French Territorials had been assembling since August 20 between the Scheldt and the sea, and on the 23rd his Eighty-fourth Division was at Valenciennes. This, the nearest force to us on this side, was therefore seven miles behind our left. Farther west the Eighty-second Division, lying between the Scarpe and Lille, came in contact on the 23rd with part of the Second German Cavalry Division, and its advanced troops were turned out of Tournai. The Eighty-first Division watched the frontier between Lille and Dunkirk, so as to prevent raiding parties of German cavalry

and armoured cars from interrupting the British communications with the Channel ports, while d'Amade's last division, the Eighty-eighth, had just arrived at Arras. These troops were therefore very scattered; they had been hastily organised and were lacking in equipment, so that while they were able to confine the activities of the German cavalry, they were not yet in a position to oppose the advance of von Kluck's main bodies. Thus throughout the night of the 23rd-24th the British Army lay isolated in the presence of an enemy of more than twice its strength.

Von Kluck's plan for the 24th appears to have been to hold the British centre to the south of Mons while his flank corps enveloped the British right and left, but his troops, after the experiences of the previous day, set cautiously to work, and the German infantry was in no mind to approach the British trenches until they had been well pounded by artillery. Sir Douglas Haig on the British right had had information on the previous evening of the retreat of the Fifth French Army, and, before the receipt of Sir John French's orders, had made all preparations for the withdrawal, which he saw to be inevitable. On receipt of these orders he was able to slip away early in the morning before von Kluck's Ninth Corps had completed its preparations.

On Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's front, south and south-west of Mons, the German Third and Fourth Corps opened a heavy bombardment soon after dawn, and followed this some two or three hours later with infantry attacks in mass, which were again met and mowed down by the British rifle fire; while somewhat later the Second German Corps and the German cavalry, working forward from the neighbourhood of Condé against the British cavalry division and the 19th Brigade on the extreme left, began to make themselves felt. This German envelopment should, to have been effective, have taken place twelve hours earlier, for by the time it began the arrangements for the move back to Bavai had been completed, all the impedimenta had been sent back, and every one knew how and when to withdraw. The German blow was in great part delivered in the air, and though, as will be seen, the British cavalry and Fifth Division on the left did not escape scathless, the greater part of French's Army was withdrawn from the sweep of the avalanche which threatened to overwhelm it, without material loss to themselves, leaving the battle-field strewn with the new field-grey uniforms which a few weeks before had been drawn from the mobilisation stores in Germany.

The retreat from Mons had begun.

CHAPTER VI

PURSUIT AND RETREAT[1]

TEN miles south of Mons lay the northern forts of Maubeuge. This was not a fortress of the value of Verdun or Toul, for the French Governments, slow to believe that even Germany would violate her own pledge by forcing a way through Belgium, had never lavished on the defence of French Flanders anything approaching the sums which had been spent to safeguard the frontier where it marched with the German Reichsland. Still there had not been wanting thoughtful French soldiers who kept an anxious eye on the north-east, and plans for making the best of the defences of Maubeuge were ready when the storm burst. The first sounds of war heard by the British Army as it assembled to the south of the fortress were the constant explosions telling that General Fournier was busy clearing the woods and buildings which obstructed the fire from his works, and as we marched

[1] For the operations up to and including the battle of Le Cateau see Map II.; for the retreat from Le Cateau see Map I.

northwards and saw the well-dug trenches and thick entanglements which formed an enceinte some twenty miles in extent connecting the permanent works, it seemed as if here was indeed something solid upon which we could in emergency rely for support. Fournier with a garrison of about 35,000 Territorials and reserve troops barred the main roads leading southwards from Mons and the railways both from Mons and Charleroi; Maubeuge therefore influenced immediately both the British retreat and the German pursuit.

The north-eastern forts of the place lay five miles south-west of Sir Douglas Haig's right, and the roads to the east of these forts were blocked by the retreat of the French Fifth Army; so the first movements of the British Army were perforce in a south-westerly direction. Von Kluck had evidently been ordered to continue to move in the same direction with his whole army and to leave Maubeuge to be dealt with by von Bülow, for we find him on the 24th setting all his columns in motion on lines taking them west of the fortress, which was invested by the Seventh Reserve Corps of the Second German Army, brought up with the siege artillery from Namur, and, as we know, the place fell on September 7 just at the time when the crises of the battles of the Ourcq and of the Marne were approaching. Von Kluck had, as we

have seen, made his plans for a general attack for the morning of the 24th on the front and flanks of the British Army, and it is a difficult matter to change plans quickly in the presence of an enemy. News dribbles back slowly from the fighting front to Headquarters, and orders are long in reaching troops once they are scattered over the battle-field, while the troops themselves, when they have once paid such a penalty for approaching rashly an occupied position, as had the Germans on the 23rd in their advance to the Mons Canal, are very cautious in drawing near to lines which they know to have been held, even long after they have been abandoned. Many times in this war withdrawals both by ourselves and the enemy have only been discovered after a surprising lapse of time. In this case the retirement of the British right flank was covered by Maubeuge, and the guns of the forts gave the Germans an added reason for caution. This probably accounts for the fact that neither the considerable force of cavalry which von Kluck had on his left, nor his Ninth Corps moving forward from Binche, interfered with the retreat of Sir Douglas Haig's corps, which at nightfall reached positions between Maubeuge and Bavai. Even our 5th Cavalry Brigade, which covered this movement, was hardly molested. Nor was the Third German Corps, after its morning repulse to the

south of Mons, more successful in getting into touch with the Third Division, which formed the right of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's corps, but the Fourth and Second Corps, forming, with an ample force of cavalry, von Kluck's right, had a different story to tell. On this side the German plan seems to have been to use the Fourth Corps in pressing the front and flanks of Smith-Dorrien's Fifth Division, while the Fourth Cavalry Division, with the help of part of the Second Cavalry Division, attacked the British cavalry, and the Second Corps marched southwards from Condé to get well round the British left flank and encompass its destruction.

In the area on both sides of the canal between St. Ghislain and Condé, von Kluck cannot have had, on the morning of the 24th, a superiority of less than four to one over the British, but he had waited too long to use his strength. It is a comparatively simple problem to defeat an enemy who accepts battle in ignorance that he is opposed by overwhelming force; it is quite another matter to snatch victory from an enemy who has prepared his plans for retreat. Between dawn and dusk on this day there ensued between the southern limits of the mining villages and the Bavai—Valenciennes road a running and unequal fight, in which the masses of German infantry and cavalry, always working round the British left, were delayed and

hampered in a series of desperate actions throughout the long hot August day by the devotion of Allenby's and Ferguson's men. Some of the battalions of Ferguson's Fifth Division suffered heavily in actions as honourable to the British infantry as any in their long and glorious history, and the Germans picked up not a few prisoners; but the columns of von Kluck's Fourth Corps in their efforts either to break the resistance of the British, or to hold them until the Second Corps could come round and cut them off, again gave both our foot and artillery such targets as, in the words of one of our battery commanders, they had prayed they might see before they died, and the Germans could never find a chance of using effectively their weight of numbers. In fact, the bulk of the Fourth Corps suffered so heavily in the fighting in the morning amidst the mining villages, where it was attacking the main body of the Fifth Division in front, that it appears to have been too exhausted to continue the pursuit, and it was upon a flank guard of two battalions and a battery of our Fifth Division, aided by a brigade of Allenby's cavalry, during the remainder of the day that the brunt of the fighting fell, as the advance of that part of the Fourth Corps which was engaged in the turning movement, steadily reinforced by the Second Corps, became more

and more menacing. Dramatic incidents were crowded into this series of Homeric combats, and must be left to the historian with all the records at his disposal to describe, but two at least may be mentioned as typical of the kind of fighting of this day. Both of them occurred near Audregnies, a name to be for ever famous in the history of the British Army. At the time when the flank attack of the German Fourth Corps had reached its full development a column of German infantry, almost certainly not less than a regiment of three battalions, was just debouching to attack, when "L" Battery, R.H.A., came into action behind a hedge 2000 yards from them, and, almost unaided and under heavy and continuous fire from not less than four enemy batteries, kept them at bay for nearly three hours, finally withdrawing without the loss of a gun, when almost all its ammunition had been expended.

The second incident is of a single company of the Cheshire Regiment, which by some mischance did not receive orders to retire, and with the aid of a machine-gun held up until dusk a second German column, also of about three battalions. When at last this little band of heroes was overpowered and captured, the Germans found only some forty unwounded men to stand up and hand over the arms which they had used until, in the words of one of them, they were weary of slaughter.

Evening found the harassed British left flank, shepherded by Allenby's cavalry, who this day taught the Germans what can be done by men who know how to use the horse and rifle in combination, safely in line with the remainder of French's Army on a front extending from La Longueville, through Bavai toward Jenlain, that is, along the main road from Maubeuge to Valenciennes.

It will be remembered that the Eighty-fourth French Territorial Division was at Valenciennes. There it was attacked by a column of the Second German Corps, and, being without any means of replying effectively to the German field howitzers, it fell back in the direction of Cambrai; while patrols of the Second German Cavalry Division occupied Douai, the general line of defence of d'Amade's Territorials being thus drawn back to between Douai and Cambrai. On the right of the British Army the German Second Army had during the day forced General de Lanrezac back farther south, and in the evening his left corps, the Eighteenth, was near Solre-le-Chateau, twelve miles south-west of the British right; while the Fifty-third and Sixty-ninth Reserve Divisions had halted inside the circle of the forts of Maubeuge, but had orders to continue the retreat at dawn. General Sordet's cavalry corps, which was intended to assist in checking the threatened envelopment,

had been unable to get across to our left flank owing to the congestion of the roads and to the exhaustion of his horses, so that, except for the friendly shelter of Maubeuge, the British Army still lay isolated and within cast of the net which von Kluck was spreading.

Just as in the first day of the retreat the fortress of Maubeuge had influenced the movements both of Sir John French and of von Kluck, so now the great forest of Mormal, which lies to the south of the fortress, settled in great measure the direction of the marches of the second day. This forest, stretching for ten miles from north to south, with a width of about six miles, is traversed only by the roughest tracks, unsuitable for vehicles. Were the whole British Army to attempt to pass to the west of it there would be created a very dangerous gap between the British right and the French Fifth Army, while the British left would be pushed out into the very arms of the German columns which were seeking it. There were not sufficient roads for the whole Army to pass to the east of the forest, so it was divided, Sir Douglas Haig marching by the east on Landrecies, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien moving by the west on Le Cateau. From the prisoners captured on the 23rd and 24th—for parties of our men had been cut off and a considerable number of our wounded had of necessity been left in Mons

and the neighbouring villages—von Kluck must by now have been well informed of the strength of the British Army, and as von Bülow can hardly have failed to send him news of the continued retreat of the French Fifth Army, he should have appreciated that his chance of annihilating the little force which was falling back before him depended upon swift and energetic pursuit. Yet, though von Kluck had the whole of the Fourth and Ninth Cavalry Divisions and the greater part of the Second to follow up the retreating British, who moved off from their bivouacs about Bavai before dawn on the 25th, much of this mass of cavalry appears to have been employed in searching to the west for the Allied left flank, so that it might be enveloped when found, instead of being concentrated upon the task which lay at hand.

Some of the German cavalry became engaged with Allenby's men, very early in the day, to the south-east of Valenciennes, but made very slow progress against them in another running fight at long range, and were unable to get through to attack the flanks of Smith-Dorrien's infantry columns, which were marching to positions just off the Le Cateau—Cambrai road. Towards evening, however, the German horse, supported by some of their infantry, caught up and attacked an infantry rearguard of our Third Division holding a position

just north of Solesmes. At that time the British cavalry was endeavouring to move south-eastwards towards Le Cateau, to fill the gap between the British First and Second Corps caused by the movement on either side of the Mormal Forest. The village of Solesmes, which lies in a hollow, was, just at the time when the German cavalry attack became threatening, packed with the waggons of French refugees fleeing before the German advance, with the transport of the British cavalry, and with parties of French Territorials who had been cut off in the retreat from Valenciennes. It was a chance of turning retreat into wild confusion such as has rarely fallen to cavalry, but the German horsemen, ignorant of what was going on behind the British front, and wearied with long days of marching, were in no mind to push an attack home late in the evening against infantry who showed a bold front. So the little British rearguard, composed of two battalions, the Wiltshires and South Lancashires, and a battery of artillery, stoutly holding its own till after dark, gained time for the congested roads to be cleared. It then fell back to its billets at Caudry, which it did not reach till midnight, having started its day's work at three o'clock that morning. The German cavalry appear to have gone off to find billets and water at nightfall, and made no further efforts to find out what the British were doing.

Von Kluck's Third and Fourth Corps seem to have spent the morning in reorganising after the confused fighting of the day before, and then to have continued their march south-west, the Fourth Corps by Le Quesnoy and Solesmes, the Third Corps moving some time after the Fourth by the road just west of the Mormal Forest. Between the right of the Fourth Corps and the Second Corps, which marched through Valenciennes towards Cambrai, now appears for the first time since the Germans marched south from Brussels an addition to von Kluck's Army in the shape of the Fourth Reserve Corps. Whether this corps had followed by road from Brussels or been brought up by train it is not yet possible to say, but it certainly fought next morning on the battle-field of Le Cateau, and it was marching with the First German Army on August 25.

Eastward of the Mormal Forest von Kluck's Ninth Corps, which had not been seriously engaged since it met the Belgians on August 18, followed up Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps with more vigour, as its advanced guards at dusk attacked the British at Maroilles and Landrecies just as they were settling into their billets. Some stiff village fighting lasted well into the night, our 4th Guards Brigade in particular earning distinction at Landrecies, which the Germans attempted to enter after dark, under cover of the ruse of dressing the leading ranks in

French uniforms and answering our challenges in French. Both attacks failed, but they had at least the effect of breaking the well-earned rest of our weary men. Had his troops everywhere displayed the same energy, von Kluck might in a short time have completely exhausted the British troops, upon whom the tension of a retreat, the reasons for which they could not understand, days of fighting followed by long marches under a hot August sun, ending usually in a hard spell of entrenching, want of sleep, and the strain of constant readiness to meet some vague unknown danger, had begun to tell. Luckily for us the strain was not confined to one side, for though they had the incomparable moral fillip of success, of penetrating each day farther and farther into the enemy's country, of picking up broken-down stragglers and the *débris* of an army in retreat, yet physical weariness was affecting the German troops too. The supply arrangements were not working smoothly, for Maubeuge blocked the railways which might have fed von Kluck's army, and many of the bridges over the Mons Canal had been destroyed. It was therefore difficult for the supply columns to keep pace with the continuous advance, and many of the German troopers whom we captured complained that neither they nor their horses were properly fed; so on the night of

the 25th August two weary armies faced each other.

It had been Sir John French's intention to continue the retreat on the 26th with his whole army, and Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps did, in fact, march southwards in the direction of Guise in close touch with the two reserve divisions of the French Fifth Army, but late in the night of the 25th-26th Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien found that many of his troops had only just come in after over twenty hours of continuous and heavy work, that the enemy were close along his front, and that it was out of the question to continue the retirement at dawn. He therefore issued orders to stand and fight on the ridge which runs just south of the Le Cateau—Cambrai road.

Soon after daybreak on the 26th the leading men of a German advanced guard entered Le Cateau and discovered that the little town was full of British troops. In fact, in and around the place was the 19th Infantry Brigade, and a great part of the British cavalry division was not far distant, both having come in from the left flank and settled down after dark in complete ignorance of their surroundings; while some battalions of the British Fifth Division were also just outside the town. The confused fighting which followed was enough to supply the Germans with the information that

the British were in force, and were not retiring, for the German batteries which came into action drew an immediate response from British guns on the ridge south-west of the town. At an early hour the leading troops of the Fourth German Reserve Corps attacked Caudry, and found it held and the British entrenched and supported by artillery in position on either side of the place, while the Jägers and armoured cars of the German Cavalry Corps discovered that British infantry were in position between Caudry and Wambax. When these reports reached von Kluck his emotions must have been very similar to those of Napoleon on the morning of June 18, 1815, when he found the British in position at Waterloo. The commander of the First Army would be aware that his Ninth Corps was in touch with Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps, which was falling back, and that there was a big gap between it and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's right, and his cavalry would have told him that Cambrai was held by a French force, but that there was an interval of several miles between that town and the British left, which had apparently been reinforced. After making all allowances for this reinforcement, it was out of the question that the British could oppose any but very inferior numbers to the four corps and three cavalry divisions which he had within reach of the battle-

field. Even assuming, as is possible, that the whole of the Fourth Reserve Corps did not reach the battle-field on the 26th, he cannot have had less than 130,000 men to oppose to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's 55,000 and to some 4000 French in Cambrai, while his superiority in guns was not less than three and a half to one. His plan was a repetition of that which failed to mature at Mons on the 24th; that is to say, he proposed to make a frontal attack, mainly with his artillery, followed by enveloping attacks on both flanks. The Fourth Corps and Fourth Reserve Corps were to make the attack on the British front from the west of Le Cateau towards Cattenières. The Third Corps, of which the main body seems to have been at some distance from the field when the battle opened, and the Ninth Cavalry Division were to attack and envelop the British right. The column composed of the Second Corps and Second Cavalry Division were to work round the British left, while the remainder of the Second Corps moved on Cambrai.

Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had the greater part of Allenby's cavalry on his right between Le Cateau and the Sambre, then came the Fifth Division, which, after its hard day on the 24th, had crossed the line of march of the Third Division and moved to the inner flank, and now held the front from the southern outskirts of Le

Cateau to Troisvilles, with the 19th Brigade in support. The Third Division held the centre as far as Caudry, and on the left lay the Fourth Division, which had just arrived, not quite complete, from England, and had moved forward north of the Le Cateau—Cambrai road the day before to protect the retirement of the Second Corps. The artillery and one of the infantry brigades of the division had moved back at dusk to the south of the Warnelle Brook, expecting to continue the retirement, but the remaining two brigades only arrived at a very late hour at Beauvois and Haucourt, where they still were at dawn on the 26th. The 4th Cavalry Brigade took position to the left rear of the Fourth Division and watched the flank.

Just as on the right the battle opened at an early hour with some indiscriminate fighting about Le Cateau, so that part of the infantry of the Fourth Division which was about Beauvois and Haucourt came into collision soon after 4 A.M. with German cavalry and the Fourth Reserve Corps advancing through and on either side of Cattenières. The intention was that the Fourth Division should take up its battle position with its right flank near Caudry and its front along the north bank of the ravine formed by the Warnelle Brook towards Esnes. Before they could establish themselves on this line the two infantry brigades, which could not at first be sup-

ported by artillery, as the guns were moving to their posts along the Warnelle, became involved in an unequal fight with German cavalry and infantry in greatly superior numbers supported by a strong force of artillery. Our men fell back slowly, and the front of battle was formed roughly along the Warnelle Brook between 8 and 9 A.M. The Fourth Reserve Corps, which had not fought at Mons and was perhaps less cautious for that reason than its neighbour, had probably started in the morning expecting to follow up an enemy in full retreat, an expectation which would be confirmed by the withdrawal of the first British infantry they had met. Its somewhat premature advance was brought rudely to a standstill by the steady rifle fire of the British infantry and the accurate bursts of shrapnel from our guns.

These events must all be regarded as preliminaries, for von Kluck's orders for battle can hardly have reached his troops at the time when they took place, since he would not have been aware, until the first reports from his advanced troops came back to him, that the British meant to stand and fight. Certainly, judging from his subsequent procedure, an attempt to rush positions held by British infantry formed no part of his plans. His method of attack was in fact exactly that described by the German officer whose letter

I have quoted in the last chapter—to reduce the wasps' nests by the fire of the guns. The battle proper opened with a heavy bombardment, which steadily developed in intensity as the artillery of his four corps came into action. A series of villages formed supporting points either on or close behind the British front, and Troisvilles, Audencourt, Caudry, Ligny, Haucourt, and Esnes, all standing prominently along the ridges which formed the main position, each with a church spire rising from its centre, made fine targets for the German howitzers. We had not then learned that while a village can be turned into a small fortress if there is ample time, material, and labour to prepare it for defence, it is a trap when exposed, without such systematic preparation, to the pounding of high explosive shell. The supports, the headquarters of battalions and brigades, and the collecting stations for the wounded which had been established in the churches and more solid buildings, were all sooner or later forced to leave by the constant rain of projectiles.

Our own artillery, though inferior in numbers and in weight of metal, found itself much more favourably placed than at Mons, and attempts by the German infantry to come forward and test the strength of our entrenchments repeatedly withered away under our searching and accurate shrapnel fire. Only on

the right flank was part of the artillery of the Fifth Division unable to find covered positions, and there the gunners, shelled simultaneously from the north and the east, suffered heavily, but though a number of their guns were damaged and the enemy seeing them in the open could concentrate upon them an apparently overwhelming fire, yet to the very last such guns as remained serviceable were kept in action. For the most part, however, both the enemy's artillery and our own devoted their attention to the infantry, the Germans trying to drive our men from their entrenchments by weight of shell and our artillery seeking to prevent the development of an infantry attack.

After the check administered by our Fourth Division to the German Fourth Reserve Corps on the left, the enemy's infantry, except at two points, made few attempts to press in, but waited, enduring our shelling and watching the effect of their own. These two points were the extreme right flank near Le Cateau and the village of Caudry. Near Le Cateau the ground was more broken than elsewhere on our front, and the German infantry, covered by the fire of their guns, established in great numbers in a semicircle round our flank, were able to work forward and keep up a constant fire, mainly from machine-guns, throughout the forenoon upon the infantry of the Fifth Division, which had to stand

a heavy and continuous shelling, and could not receive the same support from their artillery as was given by our guns more comfortably established on other parts of the line of battle. Thus it happened that the Fifth Division, which had been moved to the inner flank, that it might be less exposed after the severe trial it had endured in the withdrawal from Mons, had again by the fortune of war to bear the brunt of this day's fighting. By a curious mischance the other point of danger, the village of Caudry, was also held by troops which had been sorely tried. Its garrison was found by the 7th Infantry Brigade, which had formed the rearguard of the Third Division on the previous day, and having been engaged in a stiff fight until well after dark near Solesmes, a great part of the brigade had only reached Caudry at a very late hour and in a state of exhaustion.

As already described, the first troops of the Fourth German Corps struck the village at an early hour, before there had been time to establish a complete defence, and some of the German infantry succeeded in entering the place. When a little later our Fourth Division drew back to its battle-line along the Warnelle, Caudry was left a salient jutting out like a bastion from the angle of the British front, and became a target such as the German loves. Just as at the opening of the battle of the Sambre

the enemy's first blow fell on Namur at the angle of the Allied line, and on the 23rd he first pressed against the salient to the north of Mons, so now he followed up the early efforts of his advanced guard with repeated attempts to get hold of Caudry, and kept up against it throughout the forenoon constant infantry attacks varied by spells of heavy shelling. It was the German guns which drove the British out of the village about noon, but a counter-attack at once regained a part of it, and the enemy's infantry were prevented from making any substantial progress.

At 1 P.M. the British front, which had for seven hours been in contact with forces in greatly superior numbers, was still everywhere intact, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's courage in accepting battle had been justified; but he knew that his right would become more and more exposed by the retirement of the First Corps, and that columns of German troops, which in the morning had been at some distance from the battle-field, were still converging on his men. He was also aware that it would take time to get the heavier impedimenta out of the way, and for the orders to retire to reach his troops, so that when they began to move back the afternoon would be well advanced and darkness would before long cover the retreat. He therefore decided that, as the stubborn resistance which

had everywhere been offered to the enemy afforded a chance of withdrawal, and any chance of plucking his men from the danger of envelopment which hung over them must be seized, the orders to fall back should go out.

This decision was no less bold than that of the previous night to stand and fight. The orders for the retreat from Mons had been prepared before dawn on August 24, and had reached the troops ere they had become engaged on that day, so that the army generally knew beforehand what to do and how to do it, but a withdrawal in broad daylight, when the battle was at its height, and the troops in close touch along the whole front with an enemy who had in position an overwhelming preponderance of guns belching high explosive shell and shrapnel, was an operation which most soldiers before the war would have regarded as involving complete and irremediable disaster. Yet it was very nearly accomplished with entire success, of which it just failed because the left of the Fourth German Corps, apparently considering that even British infantry would be unable to stand the pounding of its guns from front and flank, and assured of the support of the main bodies of the Third Corps, which by now had reached Le Cateau and was ready to fall on our right flank, began an assault upon the war-worn Fifth Division before

the orders for retreat had been fully circulated. This to some extent precipitated the retirement, which, as far as concerns the extreme British right, the Germans might claim was not voluntary. But the Fourth Corps did not realise its success, or it was slow in communicating the news to the remaining German corps, for these did not begin to press in. The withdrawal of most of the British infantry was covered with great skill and devotion by the artillery, and was effected with astonishingly little loss after the trenches had been evacuated, a result to which another and unforeseen cause largely contributed. I have mentioned that the retreat began before orders could reach all the troops. The consequence of this was that at a number of points along the front parties of our infantry, varying in size from several companies to quite small detachments, remained in the front trenches in ignorance that their comrades had withdrawn. Most of these were eventually captured by the enemy and spent long years in German prisons, but it must be some consolation to them to know that by holding on as they did to the last they completely deceived the enemy as to what was going on and prevented an immediate pursuit of their comrades. In no other way is it possible to account for the inaction of the enemy, who was seen to be still bombarding our front trenches to

the east of Caudry at a time when the main bodies of our infantry, rapidly re-formed after the first disorder of the withdrawal, were crossing the ridge near Elincourt, six miles to the south.

Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien marched his columns partly through St. Quentin, and partly by roads to the west of that town, straight for the Somme, at and near Ham, and had got his whole force safely across the river at an early hour on the 28th. The cavalry covered their retreat with great skill, and only occasionally were parties of German cavalry able to come in contact with the infantry columns, which beat them off without difficulty. None the less for infantry which had taken part in a long day's fighting and endured hours of shelling from the enemy's massed batteries it was an exhausting effort. All the columns marched day and night, relieved only by brief halts, which gave little opportunity for sleep, some covering in thirty-eight hours as much as forty miles, in many cases without food.

Fortune had a second time presented von Kluck with the chance of inflicting an annihilating defeat upon the British Army, and a second time he had failed to take the chance when it came. Obsessed as he was with the idea that by a wide envelopment alone could decisive success be won, the detours of his flanking columns brought them too late to the battle-field, and this, combined with

the respect for British rifle fire and British shrapnel with which his infantry was imbued, and with the cool leadership of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, enabled our Second Corps to escape from what, on the morning of the 26th, appeared to be certain destruction.

Had von Kluck been a great commander he would, as soon as he had discovered that the British had been forced to accept battle in greatly inferior numbers, have prepared not only for success on the battle-field, but for such a pursuit as would have converted retreat into rout. For this he had an ample force of cavalry at hand, and it should have been carefully rested, watered, and fed, while the infantry and artillery were employed in driving the British from their positions, in order that it might be ready to follow up retirement promptly and energetically. An attack by a fresh cavalry division upon our weary and exhausted Fifth Division on the afternoon of the 26th might have been decisive in its effect. Certainly cavalry is never likely to obtain a more favourable opportunity than was presented at that time, but the German cavalry never appeared at all. They had been wearied by employment throughout the day on enterprises which had no influence on the result of the battle, and in the evening were seeking food and water when they should have been pressing

hard upon our men. Pursuit cannot be improvised, for the limits of human endurance are reached even by those who have taken part in a victorious battle ; it must therefore be prepared beforehand, and this von Kluck, though time and means were available, neglected, for he was thinking of other things.

The battle of Le Cateau was the last important engagement of the retreat from Mons, which was not again seriously molested. The Germans entirely failed to appreciate either the opportunities which it presented or its results, and, as will be seen, this misconception led to vital change in their plans ; but before coming to that change the story of the events on either side of the battle-field must be completed.

First, as to the left flank : the French troops which have been mentioned as holding Cambrai on the 26th August consisted of part of the Sixty-first Reserve Division. This division and another reserve division had been detached from the garrison of Paris, and had just joined General d'Amade. These troops had been attacked during the battle of Le Cateau by the main body of the German Second Corps and had fallen back on Bapaume, whence they had marched to Peronne in touch with General Sordet's cavalry corps. The French cavalry had at length been able to cross the roads congested by the retreating columns of the French Fifth Army and of

the British Army, and on the 26th were to the south of Cambrai. On the 28th, that is, on the day on which the British Second Corps crossed the Somme at Havre, Sordet's cavalry and the two reserve divisions were attacked on the Somme near Peronne, and again compelled to fall back, the reserve divisions retiring on Amiens, followed by the enemy.

Meanwhile a much more important development had taken place just to the south. General Manoury had arrived at Montdidier, and following him from the Alsace front came the Seventh French Corps, part of which had already detrained. Manoury had been ordered by Joffre to form and take command of a Sixth French Army, consisting of this Seventh Corps and of other troops to be sent north from Alsace, of Sordet's cavalry corps, very much reduced by the exhaustion of its horses, and of d'Amade's two reserve divisions. Thus a force which was destined to play a great part in the campaign was gradually forming to meet von Kluck's envelopment and to cover the threatened British left. It was the beginning of the formation of a new mass of manœuvre to take the place of Joffre's original reserve, the Fourth Army, which was heavily engaged in the Ardennes. As we shall see, this Sixth Army was steadily increased during the next few days, while yet another army, the Ninth, under the command of General Foch, was

being formed behind the French centre by the withdrawal of corps from other armies. Thus Joffre's measures for seizing the opportunity, which was to present itself before very long, were taking definite shape.

On Smith-Dorrien's right Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps had retired on the 26th due south from Landrecies, where it had been engaged during the previous night with von Kluck's Ninth Corps; but the First German Army, for reasons which will appear, seems to have been ordered to continue to move south-westwards. Accordingly on the 27th, while the Second British Corps was retiring from Le Cateau, the Ninth Corps turned off from following up Sir Douglas Haig, and moved in the direction of St. Quentin, leaving our First Corps to the tender mercies of the Guard Cavalry Division and the Seventh Corps of von Bülow's Second Army. Troops of these formations engaged a rearguard of the First British Division, and succeeded in isolating a battalion of the Munster Fusiliers, which, after a desperate and gallant fight against very long odds, was surrounded near Etreux, where the Landrecies—Guise road crosses the Sambre, and lost more than three-quarters of its effectives, the remnant being rescued by the plucky intervention of a squadron of the 15th Hussars. The noble stand of this

unfortunate battalion enabled the remainder of the corps to complete its march without difficulty.

The 28th was chiefly remarkable for the first real attempts of the German horse, chiefly of their Second Army, to follow up the British retreat in force, attempts which were checked by our cavalry, who again showed themselves to be the better men whether in mounted attack (the 12th Lancers had this day the satisfaction of getting home with the lance) or in dismounted action, and, thanks to this friendly screen, the weary infantry completed their marches without molestation. On this evening the First Corps lay between the Gobain Forest and the Oise to the south of La Fère, the Second Corps to the north of the Oise about Noyon, both corps being covered by the cavalry.

CHAPTER VII

VON KLUCK CHANGES DIRECTION [1]

THE British Army owed its immunity from pursuit after the battle of Le Cateau to a variety of circumstances, chief amongst which were von Kluck's failure to appreciate the results of the battle, and the effect of this failure upon von Moltke at German Headquarters. The German official reports of this period give the impression that the British Army had been completely defeated and was in disorderly retreat. Now it is notorious that official reports are frequently highly coloured, for other than military reasons, and that they do not necessarily represent the real opinions of the military authorities by whom they are prepared and issued; but when the actions of these authorities accord with the general tenor of their reports it is fair to assume that the latter reflect their real views. The German official report of August 27 ran as follows:

Nine days after its concentration the German Army has advanced victoriously into French territory from

[1] For von Kluck's marches see Map I.

Cambrai to the southern Vosges. The enemy has been beaten on the whole front, and is in full retreat. In view of the enormous extent of the field of battle, which runs through wooded and in some parts mountainous country, it is not possible to give exact figures as to the enemy's losses in killed and wounded, nor of the number of colours captured.

The army of General von Kluck has driven back the British Army near Maubeuge; and by means of a turning movement attacked again on August 27 to the south-west of Maubeuge. The armies of General von Bülow and von Hausen have completely defeated about eight French and Belgian army corps between the Sambre, Namur, and the Meuse. These battles lasted several days. Our armies are pursuing the enemy to the west of Maubeuge, and Namur has fallen into our hands, after two days' bombardment. We are now attacking Maubeuge.

It will be noticed that this report exaggerates the strength of General de Lanrezac's Army, which is said to consist of 8 French and Belgian corps, whereas we know that there was only 1 Belgian division in Namur, and the French Fifth Army consisted of 4 corps, with 5 attached divisions. This exaggeration is perhaps excusable, but it is not easy to understand why the date of the battle of Le Cateau is given as August 27. Further particulars as to this battle followed soon afterwards. The next reports said :

The English Army, to which three French territorial

divisions were attached, has been completely defeated to the north of St. Quentin; it is in full retreat through St. Quentin. Several thousand prisoners, seven batteries of field and one battery of heavy artillery have fallen into our hands.

To the south of Mézières our troops, fighting their way forward continuously, have crossed the Meuse on a wide front. Our left wing, after nine days' fighting in the mountains, has driven back the French Alpine troops to the east of Epinal. Our cavalry is advancing victoriously.

This was followed by two semi-official reports from German Headquarters. The first, dated August 29, runs:

The latest defeat of the English near St. Quentin has been brought about by the fact that our masses of cavalry, pursuing the English in their retreat towards St. Quentin, forced them to stand, and thereby enabled our army corps to intervene a second time in a decisive manner. The defeat of the English is complete. They are now completely cut off from their communications, and can no longer escape by the ports at which they disembarked.

The second semi-official report, dated the 31st, says:

The English Army is retiring on Paris in the most complete disorder, and its losses are estimated at 20,000 men.

All this information, which was sent off from

the German Headquarters at Coblenz, must have come from von Kluck, and it is evident that he believed that he had inflicted an annihilating defeat upon Sir John French's Army. No doubt the reports sent back to him by his troops of the condition of our lines at Le Cateau, after we had abandoned them, encouraged him to believe that we had fled in great disorder. As Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had, until a late hour of the 25th, intended to continue the retreat, and the orders to stand and fight did not reach all his troops until the early hours of the 26th, there had not been time to send back much of the light transport needed with the troops on the march, and this having been drawn up in and around the villages on our battle-front, had been smashed up by the enemy's artillery fire, the *débris* being scattered over the battle-field. A considerable number of guns had suffered the same fate and had to be left behind when we withdrew, while many exhausted stragglers, who had lost their way in the withdrawal, had fallen into the enemy's hands. Further, in the early days of the retreat, when we were marching day and night without regular halts, and when all the transport had been sent back as far and as quickly as possible, the troops could not be supplied with food by the ordinary methods of distribution, so Sir

William Robertson, the Quartermaster-General, had adopted the expedient of dumping alongside the roads by which we were retreating, sides of beef, flitches of bacon, piles of cheese, and cases of biscuit, so that the troops might help themselves as they passed. In distributing the supplies in this way the lorries of the Army Service Corps were sent right forward, and on more than one occasion came into contact with the enemy's cavalry. A portion of a supply column being cut off by a party of German horse, and the officer in charge summoned to surrender, his answer was to put on full speed and burst, like Norman Ramsay's guns, through the enemy's ranks, a glorious baptism of fire for our modern transport.

Much of the food deposited in this way had to be left where it was placed, sometimes because it was not found in the darkness, sometimes for lack of time to use it or of means to carry it away, and this, combined with the inevitable litter of packs and greatcoats abandoned by exhausted men, no doubt presented to the enemy a picture of disorder and rout which, as he took no steps to investigate the facts, he did not realise was not a fair representation of the state of our army.

The news spread among the German troops of a succession of overwhelming victories had raised them to a high pitch of excitement and jubilation, and

disposed them to exaggerate grossly indications of disaster and disorder in the ranks of their enemy. They had been taught to expect a rapid and complete victory over the French, and they were persuaded that the intervention of Belgium and Britain had been of no effect in staying the triumphant progress of their arms. I was in Germany at the time of the Agadir incident, when war with France seemed very near, and the Prussian regimental officers were then openly boasting that the campaign would be for them a military parade; and now that the great war for which they had been ardently longing for years had come, they were, it appears, convinced by their first successes that the military parade had come too. It seems all but incredible, now that four years of terrible experience has taught the world the meaning of modern war, that any men who had devoted their lives to its study could have desired to bring about such a calamity, but there is no question that this is so. The German military system had raised the corps of officers to the position of an autocracy, but had failed to provide them with the means of maintaining the exalted rôle they were asked to play in the national life. The great majority were very poor, and they saw around them the commercial and manufacturing classes steadily growing in wealth and setting a standard of living with

which they could not compete. Promotion was slow, the work hard and monotonous, and discontent with their straitened circumstances was rife. A very large number of German officers made no attempt to conceal their longing for a war, which they were certain would be a German triumph, and in moments of expansion spoke of the loot to be had in rich France. This being so, it is not surprising that the events of August 1914 appeared to them to be the realisation of their fondest hopes, and produced an intoxication which bemused their military judgement.

Here are two extracts from the diaries of two German officers of von Kluck's Army bearing on this period; the first is as follows:

August 23.—We receive news that we have gained a great victory near Metz.

24.—We hear that the British cavalry has been annihilated, and that six English divisions have been exterminated as they were detraining.

25.—A telegram from the Emperor, expressing his delight at the fabulous marches of the Second Corps, has been made known. We have covered about 78 miles in the last three days. The enemy is retreating fast and we are not yet in touch. There are reports of another great victory. It is said that we have taken 20,000 prisoners and 150 guns.

The second, dated August 28, runs:

This evening we had news of victories gained by

von Bülow's Second Army; our souls were filled with joy when the regimental bands played the Hymn of Praise by the light of the moon and of the bivouac fires, and the tune was taken up by thousands of voices. There was general rejoicing and jubilation, and when the next morning we resumed our march it was in the hope that we should celebrate the anniversary of Sedan before Paris.

In reality Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps had not been seriously engaged at all. The men were wearied with marching day and night, and puzzled by continual retreating, for which they could not understand the reason, but a short rest and, above all, some sleep was all that was necessary to make them as fit for battle as they had been on the day on which they marched towards Mons. The cavalry had more than held their own whenever they had met the enemy, and though both they and their horses were tired their *moral* was high. The Third and Fifth Divisions of the Second Corps had indeed been highly tried: their losses had been heavy, they had fought two severe battles against great odds and a number of engagements during the retreat, they had endured long hours of continuous shelling, they had lost much equipment, and were not fit in the days which followed immediately on the battle of Le Cateau to fight another serious engagement.

But both at Mons and at Le Cateau they had been withdrawn from their positions by order, and

had not been driven from them by the enemy, on whom they had inflicted far heavier losses than they had suffered. They knew that whatever the reasons for the retreat might be it was not due to any failure on their part to hold the positions they had been asked to defend, and therefore their spirit was very different from that of a routed army, so that they too only required rest and sleep and the replacement of their lost equipment to make them again an effective fighting force; while the Fourth Division and the 19th Brigade, which had been formed into a Third Corps under General Pulteney after they had crossed the Oise, had been less severely tried than Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's two divisions, and needed an even shorter rest to make them ready for anything.

It was the physical strain of the constant marching by day and by night, with such brief halts as left the men no time to prepare a hot meal, to wash, or to take off their boots and tend their blistered feet, much more than the fighting which told on the troops. At each halt, even at each short check, in the march the infantry dropped where they had stopped and were instantly snoring, so that the equally tired officers and non-commissioned officers had to rouse each man when the time to resume the weary tramp came. The days under a blazing August sun, when the long straight stretches

of the white dusty highroads of France burned their sore and bleeding feet, were even more trying than the nights with their added sense of some vague unknown danger, to avoid which we were retreating, always retreating. But the bombardments of those days, heavy as they appeared to troops meeting for the first time a rain of high explosive shell in what to-day would be considered mere apologies for trenches, are not comparable with the tornadoes which now herald an attack, nor had the Germans added the barbarity of poison gas to the horrors of war, so that the mental and nervous exhaustion caused by these early battles was not as great as is produced by the prolonged struggles which have followed the establishment of trench lines from the Channel to Switzerland, and the recovery from bodily weariness is much more rapid than from nervous strain. The restorative effect, upon troops who have undergone extraordinary physical exertion, of a hot meal and good night's rest and a bath is little short of marvellous, and these were what our Army chiefly needed during the first week of the retreat to enable it to take the field again.

The general condition of the British Army immediately after the battle of Le Cateau was in fact such that if our Second Corps had been followed up and forced again to fight against superior numbers it is difficult to see how it could have

escaped disaster, and in that case Sir Douglas Haig's position would have been precarious; but, if the pursuit were not pressed, it was certain that the army would quickly regain its fighting power if the enemy was kind enough to give us the one chance we needed.

From the evening of August 26 Sir John French's retreat had been directed due south to the Aisne, between Soissons and Compiègne, and the river was safely crossed by the whole army during the forenoon of August 31. From then on it became possible to reduce the length of marches, to halt at night so that the weary men should have some rest, and to begin replacing the lost equipment of the Second Corps, so that the army as a whole steadily recovered from the effects of the severe strain through which it had passed. Its losses up to the end of the battle of Le Cateau, estimated by the enemy at 20,000 men, amounted to little more than half that number, and reinforcements were available to replace at least a part of these.

Now what was von Kluck doing that he allowed our little army to escape? It would appear that his general instructions were to march south-west until he had overlapped the Allied left, and so south-westwards he went without regard to the direction of our retreat or to the opportunity which the fortune of war had presented to him.

There were French forces on the British left, and it was, in the main, against these that he directed his march on August 27. On the 26th he had been fighting on the front Le Cateau—Cambrai, and from the latter place he had driven back a part of d'Amade's Sixty-first Division. Two days later, on the 28th, that is, the day on which our Second Corps, marching due south, had reached the Oise near Noyon, he was attacking French troops at and to the north of Peronne with his right, while his left was just west of St. Quentin; so that in effect only his extreme left, consisting of his Ninth Corps, which was well to the east of Le Cateau during the battle and had been in touch with Sir Douglas Haig, crossed the line of march which Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had followed in his retreat. There was therefore no pursuit at all of the British by the German troops which had fought at Le Cateau, for the whole of them were marched off in a direction which took them away from the retreating British. It was left to von Bülow to use such of his Second Army as he could spare from following up General de Lanrezac to pursue the British, with whom, as we have seen, his Guard Cavalry Division and part of his Seventh Corps came into contact on the 27th and 28th, when they were engaged with Sir Douglas Haig and with our cavalry. On the 29th von

Bülow had other things to think about, for on that day the French Fifth Army turned round, and advancing between Vervins and Ribemont attacked and inflicted a severe reverse upon von Bülow's Guard and Tenth Corps in the neighbourhood of Guise. This most welcome diversion came at a very opportune moment for us, and effectively prevented von Bülow from taking up the pursuit which von Kluck had neglected, but it was unfortunately not powerful enough to put a stop to the progress of the German left wing, and in fact de Lanrezac's Eighteenth Corps immediately on our right was heavily counter-attacked by the Germans and forced back. It was necessary to get our own army as quickly as possible out of the enemy's reach, so that it might be rested and re-equipped, and Manoury was still far from ready, for less than a half of the troops whom he expected had detrained, and only a portion of this half had arrived at the actual front. Therefore the retreat had to be continued.

Von Kluck having captured Peronne on the 28th, on the 29th moved forward in the general direction of Amiens with his extreme right extending as far north as Albert and his left in the neighbourhood of Ham. On this day he attacked d'Amade's two reserve divisions, and such part of Manoury's Army as was ready for action along the

Somme, with his Second, Fourth, and Fourth Reserve Corps and two cavalry divisions, and secured the passages over the river. On the 30th he drove d'Amade back through Amiens and, after some delay in getting his columns across the Somme, had, by the evening of the 31st, forced Manoury across the Avre and halted north of that river, his front facing south and extending from Amiens through Roye towards Guiscard. Manoury, perceiving that it would be hopeless to attempt to complete the concentration of his army in face of an enemy in superior force, fell back, in constant touch with von Kluck's right, southwards on St. Just, and thence through Creil towards the northern defences of Paris, where we shall find him later; but it is important to remember that his army began its existence on August 26 on the Somme, where it played an important part in drawing von Kluck from our retreating army, that it grew steadily both as it retired and during the fierce struggle on the Ourcq, and that it did not, as has often been supposed, issue from Paris like Minerva from the brain of Jove and fall, fully equipped for battle, upon von Kluck's flank and rear.

August 31 saw von Kluck attain the extreme westerly point of his enveloping movement. The reports of the battle of Le Cateau and of the British retreat had by then reached von Moltke, who

seems from the information he received to have come to the conclusion that the British Army had ceased to exist as a fighting force. The ease with which d'Amade's reserve divisions had been driven back from Cambrai and Peronne, and the passages of the Somme forced against Manoury's troops, led apparently to the equally hasty deduction that these were of little value. On the other hand the French Fifth Army had been making itself unpleasant, and by actually moving forward on the 29th instead of continuing to retreat had brought itself within the grasp of von Kluck's envelopment, provided always that neither Manoury nor Sir John French interfered, and judging from von Kluck's reports they were both incapable of interfering. Away down in the south on the extreme left of the German armies everything was progressing well. The French had been driven back as far as the outer forts of Épinal, and if they were fighting stubbornly in front of Nancy and Verdun this would show that they still had large forces heavily engaged on their right, and could not therefore spare reinforcements for the menaced left. The time appeared to have come for the pincers to be closed on the French armies. September 2, the anniversary of Sedan, was approaching, and dreams of a greater Sedan than had ever before been conceived by man began to kindle the thoughts of the

Emperor and his advisers to an extent which clouded their military judgement, and made them, in order to follow a will-o'-the-wisp, turn away from the solid advantages which they might have gained by destroying the British Army, by scattering Manoury's force before it had time to concentrate, and by occupying Paris, which lay at their mercy.

This was the consequence of a pedantic adherence to theory. The German General Staff had absorbed the principle that the first object in war is the destruction of the enemy's main forces in the field, and that this achieved all else follows: fortresses fall like ripe plums from a shaken tree, capitals can be occupied at will, and complete and decisive victory is attained. They had learned from the study of past wars that when this principle has been neglected, when fortresses and capitals have proved too attractive, the penalty has been severe, and they were determined that nothing should tempt them from following the precepts of their gospel. The "contemptible" British Army was flying in disorder; its advanced base at Amiens lay at von Kluck's mercy and could be occupied at once and without difficulty, while cavalry could cut communication with the Channel ports, and this done, neither reinforcements nor stores could reach Sir John

French; the hastily collected French Territorials and reserve troops on the British left had proved of little value; the French Fifth Army was the left of the main French forces and was closely engaged with von Bülow, so that if von Kluck's masses could be brought down upon its flank, the whole French line would be rolled up and Paris entered after a victory such as history had never yet recorded. So von Kluck is told to send a detachment to occupy Amiens, to leave a flank guard to watch the British and the French forces on their left, and to change the direction of his main columns so as to bring them down upon de Lanrezac's flank.

The fallacy of this reasoning lay in the assumptions that the British Army had been defeated so decisively as to be incapable of interference, that Paris had only a moral and not a military value, and that Manoury could be safely neglected. On the first point the German Headquarters were apparently misinformed by von Kluck, but it should have been realised that an army which is not pursued recovers rapidly and cannot be left alone with impunity. The chief responsibility for the failure to pursue us must rest with von Kluck, who was the man on the spot, and who ought, whatever his instructions were, to have adapted them to the changes of the military situation as they occurred. To continue to march

south-west when the enemy is retiring due south is as curious a manœuvre as is to be found in military history. War is very unforgiving of mistakes, and rarely offers a second time opportunities which have not been accepted, while of all the opportunities which it can present the retreat of an enemy from a battle-field is the most favourable if it is promptly seized, and the most pregnant of unpleasant consequences if it is neglected. Napoleon failed to pursue Blücher after he had defeated him at Ligny, and this failure led directly to his downfall at Waterloo; von Kluck failed to pursue Smith-Dorrien after Le Cateau, and paid the penalty in the retreat to the Aisne. It may be assumed that the Germans obtained early information that we were abandoning our main base at Havre, and they may have deduced from this that our army would be unable to receive from England reinforcements, stores, and supplies for a long time to come. If they were influenced by this consideration (and it would appear from the semi-official report which I have quoted that they were), then they had forgotten that our sea-power would allow us to open a new base upon the French Atlantic sea-board and to establish a line of communications not exposed to the predatory raids of their Uhlans.

As to the second point—the value of Paris—

it is perfectly true that its occupation would not have ended the war in the West, and that this result would only be attained by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Allied armies. The French Government, ready for any sacrifice, had made all preparations for transferring the seat of government to Bordeaux, and was prepared even to abandon the capital to the enemy if the need arose; but Paris, besides being the capital of France, was her most important railway centre and a large military depot. The great city was ideally placed for the assembly and maintenance of a force to counter just such a movement as von Kluck was now ordered to make, and the purely military advantages to be gained by denying to Joffre the use of the railways converging on Paris were very real. D'Amade's hastily formed second-line divisions had not proved capable of resisting first-line German troops in superior numbers; and Manoury, who had been met at a time when only a small portion of his army could be placed in the field, had not been able to oppose von Kluck effectively on the Somme; but it was a hasty assumption that if he were left alone, and had the free use of the Paris railway junctions, he would not be able to increase and organise his forces, and the wise and prudent course was to strike at the weak enemy who was in reach

and to allow him neither time nor opportunity to become strong. Instead of doing this von Kluck repeated on the 30th his manœuvre of the 27th, and just as he marched south-west from the British, who were retiring south from the battle-field of Le Cateau, so after driving in Manoury's advanced troops on the 29th, he the next day turned south-east, while the French like ourselves fell back southwards.

If on the 30th von Kluck could leave a flank guard to watch both French and Manoury, he could certainly have detached a sufficient force on the 27th to keep the latter from interfering with him while he fell with his main body upon the British Army, and either defeated it completely or drove it south of Paris. He could then have prevented the French from using the railways through Paris, have cut off Manoury and the French troops in the north from Joffre, and have drawn from the city the supplies of which he was running short. All these substantial gains were sacrificed in favour of a grandiose and ambitious scheme which, as events proved, could not be realised. It is true that by continuing to march south-west after the battle of Le Cateau von Kluck prevented Manoury from concentrating behind the Somme, but that result would have been obtained with no less certainty if the British Army had been effectively pursued,

for Manoury could not have remained in the neighbourhood of Amiens with von Kluck's Army advancing past his right, threatening to interrupt his communications with Paris and to isolate him from the remainder of the Allied forces.

There must before the war have been many anxious discussions in Germany between the military party, who believed in the power of Germany to carry through to a speedy and triumphal issue their vast programme of conquest, and the more moderate and enlightened, who foresaw something of the feeling which the policy of blood and iron would arouse. Bethmann-Hollweg's intense depression on hearing the news of Britain's intervention is an indication of the anxiety of the latter party. It is easy to imagine that the shouts of the extremists at the news of the first German victories silenced all doubts. One can almost hear the Crown Prince and his friends saying, "We told you so. The German Army is irresistible. Our enemies are soft and degenerate. We cannot be too bold. Forward with God and Kaiser to a German triumph!" In short, Prussian conceit and self-sufficiency marred the execution of a well-laid plan.

It has been reported that the Emperor, eager for an early and triumphal entry into Paris, strongly opposed the change in the direction of von Kluck's

march, but the evidence as to this is very vague, and I cannot but think that the probabilities are that he was on the side of those in favour of deferring the advance on the French capital until a greater Sedan had been consummated. His versatile and erratic mind was doubtless deeply impressed by the great successes which the surprise engineered for him by his generals had won, and he must have seen visions of taking prisoners by the hundred thousand, guns by the thousand, and colours by the hundred, in short, of a victory which should completely overshadow for all time the memory of the elder William and of the elder Moltke. Even the glory of riding through the Arc de Triomphe would be a small matter compared with so stupendous a *dénouement* to a campaign of thirty days.

Von Kluck was not alone in failing to appreciate the difference between a retreat undertaken to avoid a trap and a retirement following upon defeat in a battle which has been fought to the last. The French armies had been worsted in the first engagements, but they were not broken, and many of them had not as yet been completely engaged. It was the menace of von Kluck's advance and not the complete defeat of the French armies which had forced Joffre to swing back his line. He had been surprised and had to pay the

military penalty of surrendering the initiative to the enemy and of being forced to change his plans in haste, but it is to his eternal glory that, amidst the collapse of his first schemes, and with a burden of responsibility on his shoulders which would have appalled an ordinary man, he never lost his grasp of the situation, never wavered in his determination to return to the attack at the first opportunity, and in circumstances of extraordinary difficulty assembled at the right time and at the right place the forces necessary to enable him to seize the opportunity when it came. If Joffre stood the test of early failure, the German commanders did not stand the test of early success. For generations they and their forebears had laboured at perfecting their military machine, until in organisation, discipline, and equipment the German Army was admittedly the first of the armies of Europe, and they firmly believed that to this catalogue of its superiorities might be added valour and generalship. After more than forty years of strenuous effort in time of peace the machine was now being tested in war, and everywhere their enemies were fleeing before its blows. The bulletin of August 27 announced that "the enemy has been beaten on the whole front," in the circumstances a perfectly justifiable announcement to make to the German people, but not an appreciation of the

position upon which military plans should have been based. Yet it appears clear from the Emperor's perfervid telegrams to his family, to his people, and to his Allies, and from the action of his military advisers that at this time he was convinced that the shining sword was irresistible, that the war in the West was already won, and that any risk might be taken in order to reap the full harvest of victory.

Having given his Imperial sanction to the orders which were to go out to von Kluck, and being confident that all was going well in the North, the Emperor shortly after went off to see that his left, which was preparing an attack on Nancy, did not lag behind his brilliant right.

It has generally been assumed by French writers on this period of the war that the decision to give up the march on Paris and to move against the flank of the French Fifth Army was not reached till much later, the date generally given being September 4, but it is quite evident that on the 30th von Kluck's Army was engaged with Manoury between the Somme and the Avre, that on the 31st he was wheeling southwards, and that from then on his infantry columns were marching south-eastwards as fast as the limits of human endurance would permit, while his cavalry and his left corps were crossing the Oise at and to the south of

Noyon on the 31st, and moving towards the forests of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets. This makes it probable that the conversion from the south-westerly movement, which had been continued without deviation ever since Brussels was left on August 20, to a march south-eastwards was ordered on the 30th by von Kluck, in accordance with instructions received from von Moltke, and quite certain that the change was not made later than the 31st, for from then his columns continued to move, not towards Paris, but towards the flank of the French Fifth Army, right up to the time when they were brought to a standstill by Joffre's manœuvre.

Von Kluck ordered his Fourth Reserve Corps to move by St. Just-en-Chaussée to cover the right rear of his march from any interference by Manoury, the French having quitted that place the previous day and moved back towards Creil. Von Marwitz's cavalry protected the outer flank of the movement, and marching south-eastward through the forest of Compiègne, came on the evening of August 31 again into contact with the British Army, while on the evening of September 1 von Kluck's main body, which, now that the Fourth Reserve Corps had been detached on a separate mission, consisted of the Ninth, Third, Fourth, and Second Corps, in that order from left to right, lay with its

left a few miles north of Vic-sur-Aisne, and its right on the main Amiens—Compiègne road about twelve miles north-west of the latter place.

The British Army crossed the Aisne during the 31st and lay that night with its right, Sir Douglas Haig's corps, to the south-west of Soissons; the centre, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's corps, between Villers-Cotterets and Crépy; and the left, General Pulteney's corps, to the west of Crépy and to the south of the forest of Compiègne, the cavalry being disposed partly in the gaps between the corps and partly on the left flank. Here while our Army was still in this position a curious incident marked the dawn of September 1. For some days past such pressure as the enemy had brought to bear upon us had come from our right front, that is, from von Bülow's Army, but now von Kluck's change of direction was bringing his cavalry into touch with us from a new direction upon our left front. The German Fourth Cavalry Division appears to have crossed the dense forest of Compiègne, which would shield them effectively from the observation of our aeroplanes, during the late afternoon of the 31st, and to have halted close to the village of Nery, hoping to surprise early the next morning our Fourth Division, which they had located. Our 1st Cavalry Brigade had arrived at Nery after dark, and had, unknown to the enemy,

come between them and the Fourth Division, so the next morning opened with a mutual surprise. Our men were engaged as day broke in watering their horses when two German batteries opened fire upon them. The situation was at first an anxious one for us as the German shells fell among our horse-lines. Only three of the six guns of "L" Battery could be placed in action, two of these being almost immediately silenced, but the one remaining gun continued firing to the last. The men of the 1st Cavalry Brigade rallied from their surprise, and they were promptly supported both by the 4th Cavalry Brigade and by the 19th Infantry Brigade of General Pulteney's corps, which had halted for the night in the immediate neighbourhood and had sprung to arms at the sound of the guns. The German cavalry, who had apparently been in complete ignorance that they were in the presence of so considerable a force, fell back, leaving eight guns and a number of prisoners in our hands, and cannot have felt proud of the circumstances in which they renewed acquaintance with our troops.

About the same time that this combat was in progress the Fourth Division successfully repulsed another attack by German cavalry near Verberie, and the Fifth Division beat off an even sharper attempt by the enemy to get through what he

believed to be our broken front. Yet another surprise collision occurred later in the day in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, north of the town of that name. Sir Douglas Haig's corps was marching south-westwards through the forest so as to close finally the gap which had separated his troops from those of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien ever since August 25. The 4th and 6th Infantry Brigades of Haig's Second Division became engaged with German cavalry and the usual escort of Jägers, which were marching south-eastwards on Villers-Cotterets to clear the road for von Kluck's Third Corps. Some confused fighting ensued in the dense forest, in which the Germans were repulsed, and our men were able to resume their march, but not until the Irish Guards, who were here seriously engaged for the first time in their history, had suffered somewhat heavy losses. At the end of this march the whole of Sir John French's Army was once more united, Sir Douglas Haig's corps lying between La Ferté Milon and Betz, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's between Betz and Nanteuil, with General Pulteney's corps and the bulk of the cavalry just to the west of the latter place. Directly parallel to the British front von Kluck's main bodies were halted about eight miles to the north on a line running eastward from the southern edge of the forest of Compiègne, so that the opponents of Mons and of Le Cateau

were again face to face. General Manoury's Army had on this day fallen back from the Oise near Creil and Pont Ste. Maxence to and to the south of Senlis, a movement which sensibly diminished the gap between the British and the French on this flank.

On September 2 there occurred an even more curious development than those which had resulted on the previous day from von Kluck's zig-zag marches. It appears that on the 1st considerable bodies of the Second and Ninth Cavalry Divisions penetrated between Manoury's right and General French's left, occupied Chantilly, the Newmarket of France, which lies west of Senlis and fifteen miles north of the northern suburbs of Paris, pushed patrols up to the outer defences of the French capital, and were actively at work with armoured cars and parties of horsemen well to the rear both of the French Sixth Army and of the British Army. During the night of September 1-2 they seem to have suddenly become aware that we and Manoury were closing in upon them from left and right, and to have moved off in a great hurry to avoid being caught in a trap. Our cavalry during their march of September 2 found four guns abandoned by the enemy's horse in the forest of Ermenonville, while parties of our infantry in the course of their march southward came upon equip-

ment, lorries, and waggons which had evidently been abandoned in great haste.

When von Kluck's men had parted with the British Army after the battle of Le Cateau they had left it a very exhausted and to some extent disorganised force. While it would be absurd to pretend that the Third and Fifth Divisions in particular, which had lost a high proportion of their experienced officers and non-commissioned officers, a number of guns and machine-guns, and a quantity of transport, of which little had been replaced, had recovered altogether from the fiery trial through which they had passed, yet the Germans of the First Army on meeting us again found us with order completely restored and ready to reply at once and sharply to any attack, a discovery which caused an important modification in the German plans. At the time of the battle of Le Cateau they had been in close touch with our front and consequently well informed as to our movements, but now they found that they were no longer opposed, as they expected, to an army marching almost continuously day and night to escape their clutches, but to one moving in its own time and not in the least perturbed by their activities. Having dropped the threads which had once been in their hands, they appear to have been at first completely in the dark both as to

our condition and to our movements, and to this fact must be ascribed the curious chance collisions and still more curious marches and counter-marches which took place at this time. Nor was this the only result of the orders which had sent the First German Army at first westwards away from the enemy whom they had been fighting and then brought them back hastily eastward into the presence of the same enemy. This manœuvre had compelled von Kluck's men to march round two sides of a triangle, while the British had been moving along the base, and had put upon them a strain which, in the hot August days, proved well-nigh unendurable. An interesting picture of the state of von Kluck's Army during these days is given in the diary of a German officer taken prisoner by the French, who have translated and published his record of events. Writing on September 2, he says :

Our men are done up. For four days [1] they have been marching 24 miles a day. The country is difficult, the roads are in bad condition, and barred by trees felled across them, the fields are pitted with shell-holes. The men stagger forward, their faces coated with dust, their uniform in rags, they look like living scare-crows. They march with their eyes closed, singing in

[1] *I.e.* since the change of direction on the 30th. The object of this rapid marching being probably to catch the Fifth French Army in the act of crossing the Marne.

chorus so that they shall not fall asleep on the march. The certainty of early victory and of the triumphal entry into Paris keeps them going and acts as a spur to their enthusiasm. Without this certainty of victory they would fall exhausted. They would go to sleep where they fell so as to get to sleep somehow or anyhow. It is the delirium of victory which sustains our men, and in order that their bodies may be as intoxicated as their souls, they drink to excess, but this drunkenness helps to keep them going. To-day after an inspection the general was furious. He wanted to stop this general drunkenness. We managed to dissuade him from giving severe orders. If there were too much severity, the army would not march. Abnormal stimulants are necessary to make abnormal fatigue endurable. We will put all that right in Paris. There we will prohibit the sale of alcohol, and as soon as the men are able to rest on their laurels, order will reappear.

I would remark with reference to this candid picture of the state of discipline of the German Army that the fatigues and privations of our Second Corps during the first marches after Le Cateau were certainly greater than any which von Kluck's men had had at this time to undergo, and that our men had not the delirium of victory to sustain them, yet I never saw nor heard of a single case of drunkenness amongst them. As the wine districts of France were entered by the enemy and wine was obtainable everywhere this drunkenness in the German Army increased to an extraordinary

extent, and when the Germans were in retreat to the Aisne whole parties of officers were captured because they were too intoxicated to move. Writing on September 3, the diarist says :

> We are leaving Paris on our right and are going to concentrate toward the south-east against the *débris* of the Franco-British Army, which is vainly endeavouring to reunite its scattered fragments along the Marne. . . . Our men have no idea that we are giving up for the time being our march on Paris. They are counting so much on finding themselves at the gates of Paris to-morrow or the day after that it would be cruel to undeceive them. They would at once lose all their spring.

Von Kluck would not communicate to his subordinates more of his plans and intentions than it was necessary for them to know in order that they might carry out intelligently their daily tasks, therefore it is not at all astonishing that an officer of one of his formations should only discover on September 3, from the direction of the marches, that Paris was not the goal. The movements of the 3rd, which would have been ordered on the evening of the 2nd, took von Kluck's left through Neuilly-St. Front, his centre through La Ferté Milon and Betz, and his right through Nanteuil towards the Marne between Château-Thierry and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, obviously away from Paris. Indeed, the two left corps, the Ninth and the Third,

must have realised when they crossed the Aisne on the 1st and moved south-east to the forest of Villers-Cotterets that they at least were not marching directly on Paris; but the two right corps of the main group, the Fourth and Second, apparently still had hopes until they moved across the main Soissons—Paris road. This statement therefore shows that von Kluck's decision to leave Paris for the time being could not have been taken later than the evening of the 2nd, and as there was no perceptible change in the direction of his marches between August 31 and September 4 it is much more probable that, as I have suggested, the vital decision was reached on August 30. The officer describes how he saw von Kluck on September 4, and had a conversation with one of his staff, who told him that the General had no doubt that the Germans would quickly crush the French Army.

The reports of spies who had seen the enemy in retreat are very satisfactory. They are a disorganised and discontented horde, and there is no chance of their being able to do us any harm. The General fears nothing from the direction of Paris. We will return to Paris after we have destroyed the remains of the Franco-British Army. The Fourth Reserve Corps will have the honour of the triumphal entry into the French capital.

On the date of this last entry in the diary,

September 4, von Kluck's main body, continuing its march south-eastwards, had, for the most part, crossed the Marne, and was disposed along the Petit Morin between Montmirail and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, with the Fourth Reserve Corps watching his left rear about half-way between Nanteuil and Meaux, some eight miles west of the Ourcq, and his cavalry across the Petit Morin in touch with our troopers. Sir John French, who had continued a now leisurely retirement, had on the 3rd crossed the Marne and halted to the south of that river between La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Lagny. While we were still in this position the Fifth French Army on our right was attacked and pushed back, and as Joffre, whose plans were now beginning to take definite shape, required more room for this army, which had to take ground rather farther to the west owing to the intervention on its right of his new Ninth Army under the command of General Foch, the French Commander-in-Chief requested Sir John French to fall back yet once more, and so on the night of the 4th-5th we marched to the south of the forest of Crécy, and halting there on September 5 brought the long and adventurous retreat to an end.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OURCQ AND THE MARNE

It is now time to see what had been happening on the rest of the front while von Kluck's march was in progress. Up to the afternoon of August 23, when the enemy's plan stood revealed to him, Joffre had, it will be remembered, hoped to strike the flank of the German armies moving through Belgium by sending his Fourth Army, which had formed his original reserve, forward through the Ardennes. This movement had already developed on August 23, by which time General Langle de Cary, who commanded the Fourth Army, had crossed the Semois and come into collision with the German Fourth Army; but he had found himself hampered in the wooded and mountainous country, and was unable to make his weight felt before von Kluck's turning movement had taken effect. This was what the Germans had calculated on, and they proved right, for their envelopment, which by August 27 had driven the Franco-British left to the

south of St. Quentin, was then considerably nearer to Paris than was the French Fourth Army ; and Joffre had been compelled to draw back his whole line north of Verdun, pivoting on the fortress, in front of which General Sarrail, who had now succeeded General Ruffey in command of the Third Army, was successfully holding the German Crown Prince. So Langle de Cary had by September 4 retired slowly, through Rheims and Chalons, to a position astride the Marne south of Vitry le François, with his right in touch with Sarrail's left, which had swung back through the Argonne to the south-east of Verdun.

Joffre's second offensive plan had therefore failed to mature, but in no wise discouraged he immediately set about preparing a third. As early as August 25 he issued the following order :

As it has not proved possible to carry out the offensive manœuvre which had been planned, the object of the future operations will be to reconstitute on our left flank, with the Fourth and Fifth Armies, the British Army, and new forces drawn from our right, a mass capable of resuming the offensive while the other armies contain the enemy for the time necessary.

A new group will be formed in the neighbourhood of Amiens between August 27 and September 2.

This was the birth of Manoury's Sixth Army which Joffre had hoped would be able to take the

offensive from the Somme. But von Kluck had intervened too quickly, and Manoury, compelled to retire towards Paris, had become separated from d'Amade's two reserve divisions, the Sixty-first and Sixty-second, which had retired westward through Amiens while Manoury was falling back on Creil. From then on the task of completing the formation of the Sixth Army was entrusted to General Gallieni, the Governor of Paris, who set himself to increase Manoury's forces by reassembling and transporting to Paris d'Amade's two divisions, by constituting a new Forty-fifth Active Division of troops which had been drawn from Algeria, and by expediting the detrainment and despatch of other troops which Joffre was sending north from his right, the most important of these reinforcements being the Fourth Corps, which was detached from Sarrail at Verdun. On the evening of September 4 Manoury was covering Paris on the north-east, with his right just north of the Marne at Lagny, and his left through Dammartin. He then had with him the Seventh Corps (which had been withdrawn by Joffre from the Alsace group, had detrained near Amiens, been partly engaged with von Kluck on the Somme, and had then retreated towards Paris), the Fifty-fifth and Fifty-sixth Reserve Divisions, a brigade of Moroccan troops, and some Marines, and with these forces

was in touch with von Kluck's Fourth Reserve Corps to the west of the Ourcq. The new Forty-fifth Division would be ready to join Manoury on the 6th, the Fourth Corps had begun to detrain in Paris on the 5th, and d'Amade's Sixty-first Division was also assembling near the capital. Therefore Manoury was not only considerably superior to the German force immediately in front of him, but was certain of receiving reinforcements, while von Kluck had the greater part of his army across the Marne, well to the south-east, and was deeply committed. The time was ripe for Joffre's counter-stroke.

The French Commander-in-Chief had not been content with the formation of a Sixth Army, for his principle, in accordance with the whole trend of modern French military thought, being to manœuvre, not on a fixed plan, but in agreement with the development of the situation, he required to have in his hand as large a reserve as possible, so that he might either take advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves or be ready to parry an unexpected blow. Therefore, on August 29, when it had become clear that Manoury would have to fall back from the Somme, he had ordered the formation of the Ninth Army, under General Foch. To create this he drew partly upon his right and partly upon the Fourth Army, which

had been the least tried of any of his forces. By this means he obtained for Foch an army of eight infantry divisions, and a cavalry division, and, as soon as it became evident that the German south-easterly movement was bringing the enemy's main weight to the south of Rheims, he interposed this new army between the Fourth and Fifth Armies, so that the Fifth Army, taking ground to its left, might be able to intervene more effectively in the attack upon von Kluck, and the centre of his line between Paris and Verdun might be held safely while that attack was maturing. Accordingly, on the evening of September 4, Foch had taken his place in the line to the south of the St. Gond marshes with his centre about La Fère Champenoise.

With these dispositions completed Joffre was ready, and on September 4 he issued the following order :

> It is necessary to profit by the dangerous situation in which the First German Army has placed itself, by concentrating against it the efforts of the Allied Armies on the extreme left. During September 5 all arrangements will be made to begin the attack on the 6th.

Then follow the tasks of the different armies. Manoury was to drive the Germans over the Ourcq ; the British Army was to advance north-east and attack the Germans on the Grand Morin on either

side of Coulommiers, while the Fifth Army on the British right advanced due north. Farther to the right Foch was to hold the weight of the enemy in the centre of the new battle-front and cover the offensive of the Fifth Army. This was the order which turned retreat into advance, and at the moment when a complete triumph for the German arms appeared to be in sight changed the whole course of the war in the West. It is important to notice the rôle assigned to the British Army, because it has been hinted that we did not give Manoury all the assistance which he was entitled to expect. We were to advance in a north-easterly direction between the Fifth and Sixth Armies and were not to swerve either to the right or left to take part in battles which might be raging on our flanks. The wisdom of Joffre's choice of the line on which we were to advance will appear. But before following out the consequences of this order we must look for a moment to the extreme right, which had furnished so large a part of the troops of which Joffre had formed his two new armies.

The weakened Alsace group had, as the German communiqué of August 29 announced, been compelled to fall back on the fortresses of Belfort and Épinal, while farther to the north Castelnau, by constant local attacks in front of Nancy, covered the withdrawal of French troops from the right

flank, and successfully kept the enemy under the delusion that Joffre's main forces were still in this part of the field.

The great success achieved by their heavy howitzers at Namur had inspired the Germans with a hope that it might be possible to complete the destruction of the French armies by bursting through the formidable barrier of fortresses which line the eastern frontier of France. On September 4 we find the German communiqué saying :

The mobile heavy batteries which have been sent to us by Austria have rendered us valuable services at the capture of Givet and Namur. The mobility and the effect of the fire of these batteries are remarkable. The forts of Hirson, Ayelle, Condé, La Fère, and Laon have been taken without fighting, and all the forts in northern France are now in our possession, except Maubeuge. The enemy is in retreat to the Marne before the armies of Generals von Kluck, von Hausen, von Bülow, and of the Duke of Würtemburg. The armies of the Crown Prince of Bavaria and of General von Heeringen have still in front of them strong enemy forces holding entrenched positions in French Lorraine.

This pronouncement shows that up to the very eve of the battles of the Ourcq and the Marne the Germans believed that the Franco-British left had been beaten, and that the French right was still in great strength. The Kaiser, under the conviction that von Kluck and von Bülow on the right

had only to go forward to turn retreat into disaster, had come out to witness the defeat of the main French forces in the south and to make his entry into Nancy. So while Joffre was completing his preparations for the counter-stroke against von Kluck, Castelnau was fighting in front of Nancy against the armies of the Crown Prince Rupprecht and von Heeringen a battle very similar to our first battle of Ypres. From September 3 onwards Castelnau was with his reduced forces incessantly attacked by overwhelming numbers, the effort of the Germans culminating in a Kaiser battle on September 6, in which they were completely repulsed. As at Ypres this was followed, after the climax had been passed, by a number of spasmodic attacks probably intended to keep in the south the large forces which the Germans falsely believed to be in front of Nancy; these attacks finally dying away on the 11th, when the Germans in the north were in full retreat to the Aisne. This splendid resistance of Castelnau's men in face of great odds undoubtedly confirmed the Germans in their over-estimate of the French strength in the south, and the resultant under-estimate of the Allied strength in the north; for von Kluck continued to commit himself deeper and deeper, and on September 5[1] we find him still

[1] For the position on September 5 see Map III.

moving southwards from the Petit Morin across the Grand Morin, ready to strike at the French Fifth Army next day. But by the evening of the 5th unexpected news had reached him. His Fourth Reserve Corps had reported to him that they had been attacked by French forces in superior numbers and had been driven back towards the Ourcq. He then became suddenly aware that Manoury, so far from retreating or passively protecting Paris, was a serious menace to his rear.

The orders conveying the news that we were to turn about and go forward reached the British Army on the afternoon of September 5, and were received with the deepest joy and thankfulness. To all but the few who were in the confidence of Sir John French the advance was just as inexplicable as the retreat had been, but now no one bothered his head with searchings for causes—something had happened and we were to move north. "Why, it's better than Corunna. Moore had to take to his ships, he did not advance again," said one beaming Brigadier when he received his orders. Many of our battalions did not know when they turned out of their billets on the morning of September 6 whether they were not to march to the Atlantic, and a spontaneous burst of cheering welcomed the discovery that they were heading northwards. The news, in fact, supplied the moral

fillip which was the one thing needed to make the army forget its troubles, and complete the good work begun by sleep and regular food. The Second Corps was still woefully deficient in experienced officers, and owing to the delay caused by the change of the base and to the congestion of the railways around Paris, by the movement of troops from the south to reinforce Manoury, it had proved impossible to replace much of the lost equipment, and the Fifth Division in particular was far short of its proper complement of guns. Still the ranks had been partially refilled with drafts, and we marched at dawn of a beautiful September morning back across the forest of Crécy in a very different spirit from that in which we had moved south through the same forest some thirty hours before.

Von Kluck had decided that he must, to save himself, stop his advance and reinforce his Fourth Reserve Corps so as to defeat Manoury, and he therefore ordered his cavalry under von Marwitz to delay the advance of the British Army, while he marched his Second Corps, which on the night of the 5th-6th had halted at and about Coulommiers, back across the Marne. A little later he also withdrew his Fourth Corps, which had been opposite our right and the left of the Fifth French Army, and sent it too northwards to fight Manoury,

thus leaving a very large gap to be filled by his mounted troops. His general plan appears to have been at this time to assemble behind his Fourth Reserve Corps, which should draw Manoury on, a large force to fall upon and destroy the bold Frenchman, while his cavalry screen held up the British Army, and his left in conjunction with von Bülow's right stopped the Fifth French Army. This, unfortunately for him, they entirely failed to do, for Franchet d'Espérey, who had now replaced de Lanrezac in the command of the Fifth Army, steadily gained ground throughout the day, and the German cavalry, after resisting the British progress for some time in the forest of Crécy, finding that our advance on a broad front threatened their retreat, fell back to the Grand Morin, which was reached by the British centre in the evening.

While this was going on, the Germans farther to the south were heavily attacking Foch and Langle de Cary, and both these armies were compelled to give some ground.

It is not my purpose to attempt a detailed description of the great battle which raged during the next three days over a front of 150 miles from the Argonne almost to the outer defences of Paris, but it is necessary to understand its broad lines in order to follow what happened to von Kluck, and how his situation reacted on the other German

Armies engaged. From the time when it became clear that von Kluck in spite of his strenuous marches would not be able to cut off the French Fifth Army on the Marne, and that the British Army, again in being, was on Franchet d'Espérey's flank, some modification of the German scheme had become necessary. The outer flank of the British Army rested upon the defences of Paris, and an immediate envelopment of the Allied left was no longer in question, so instead, the German aim became to break through the French centre to the south of Epernay, sweep the *débris* of the western half into Paris, which would then be invested, while the eastern half was also broken in front of Nancy and driven towards Verdun, which was already partially enveloped on the north and west. The German Crown Prince's left was already well round Verdun, and if his Bavarian colleague and von Heeringen played their part the bulk of the forces on the French right could be locked up in the fortress and kept out of harm's way, while the German Second and Third Armies with von Kluck's help herded the Allied centre and left into Paris.

Some such decision as this was apparently reached about September 2, that is, after von Kluck had again come into contact with the British army, and found that it was not quite such

a rabble as had been supposed. The attack upon Nancy, which had been planned as part of the original programme of envelopment (it was in fact to have been the left arm of the pincers), had not then developed, and could be fitted into the new programme. The Allied centre was sagging badly, and might snap if it was pressed hard, while von Kluck advancing across the Marne would not only lend a hand to von Bülow by keeping the British Army and the French Fifth Army fully occupied, but would act as a pivot upon which the German centre would wheel to its right as it drove the enemy opposed to it across the Seine in a westerly direction. It is only possible to explain the attacks upon Nancy and on Foch's Army, and von Kluck's advance across the Marne on September 4, on the basis of some such general plan as I have indicated, for all these must have been prepared at a time when it was clear that the First German Army had not succeeded in getting round the Allied left, and before the Germans were aware of Manoury's counter-threat. This new programme of breaking through the centre apparently runs counter to the principles on which the original German plan was based, if my reading of the German mind is correct. They had, I have suggested, in the first instance avoided the attempt to get a decision by breaking through the front as being slow and costly

in comparison with an envelopment of a flank. But I believe that all the evidence points to the conclusion that the Germans, at this time, regarded the Allies in the West as substantially a beaten foe, and it is justifiable to adopt methods against a beaten foe which would be quite out of place against a more formidable opponent. It is true that the Germans had found the British Army more capable of resistance than they had expected, but it had not attempted to attack, and the Allies as a whole had been retiring for nearly a fortnight, and had been losing very heavily, so they may well have argued that the time had come to break down the enemy's last powers of resistance, and that meticulous adherence to theories which had been formed to meet quite other conditions was no longer in place.

One part of this ambitious programme had some success, for very shortly after the great attacks on Nancy were begun the German Crown Prince started an offensive against General Sarrail's right, which was gradually driven back across the Heights of the Meuse between Toul and Verdun, and so was produced in the French front the beginning of that curious indentation with its head on the Meuse near St. Mihiel which the Germans maintained until driven from it in September 1918 by the First American Army. But without the remaining con-

comitants of the plan this success proved harmless, and as early as the eve of September 6 the Germans had discovered that their castle in Spain was tumbling about their ears. The left arm of the encircling movement had definitely failed before Nancy, and the right was found to be in a very dangerous position. Being good soldiers, far from holding up their hands in despair, they immediately shaped a plan to meet the situation. The greater part of the Second and Third Armies were, as arranged, to unite in a desperate effort to overwhelm Foch and burst through the French centre, and von Kluck, as his reinforcements from the south came into play, was to defeat Manoury, while the British and the French Fifth Army were kept occupied by comparatively weak forces.

This was a bold effort to retrieve the situation, and it promised, if successful, to give the Germans such a victory as would shatter the Franco-British left wing and leave Paris at the mercy of the conqueror. If Foch could be broken and driven back to the Seine, Sir John French and Franchet d'Espérey enticed slowly forward, while von Kluck, working round Manoury's northern flank, enveloped him and drove him back into Paris, then the British and the French Fifth Army, already sorely tried by hard fighting and a long retreat, would be caught between von Kluck and von Bülow and compelled

either to fly precipitately or to accept battle under most unfavourable conditions. There were no half-measures in this plan, but it could not be carried through unless Manoury were driven back into the defences of Paris and rendered harmless, for it must have been clear to the German leaders that if the French Sixth Army had been reinforced once it might be reinforced again, and that therefore a temporary check to Manoury would leave the danger to their rear unscotched. To strengthen the Fourth Reserve Corps with sufficient force to allow of the Ourcq being held against Manoury would have meant weakening the remainder of the First Army to an extent which would have compelled it to abandon attack, and to stand on the defensive along the Grand Morin against the British and the French Fifth Army. This would have had the effect of handing over the initiative on the western flank to the Allies, an alternative which nothing in the general situation, still apparently very favourable to their arms, would have been likely to justify in the minds of the German High Command. Accordingly it was decided that Manoury should be crushed, and that, if necessary, such part of von Kluck's Army as was not required for this purpose should give ground before the British and the French Fifth Army.

For the realisation of this bold scheme it was

essential, first, that Foch should be smashed, and secondly, that the British Army should be held off long enough to allow von Kluck the time necessary to defeat Manoury thoroughly. Of these two essentials the second was the more important, for even if the plan to defeat Foch failed, von Kluck could, provided he overthrew the French Sixth Army, escape from the critical position in which he was placed, more troops could be brought south from Belgium and Maubeuge, which was on the point of falling, and the attack on the Allied left could be resumed after an unfortunate but by no means fatal delay. On the other hand, if the British were to come down upon von Kluck's flank and rear while Manoury still held the field then there would be nothing for it but retreat.

Von Kluck no doubt weighed the chances carefully, but he was apparently still under the influence of his early impressions of our army, which he regarded as a defeated and all but negligible force. He was also unaware of the extent of the reinforcements which Joffre and Gallieni had prepared for Manoury, and he seems to have counted upon having sufficient time to defeat the French Sixth Army if he struck hard with every man he could collect. He therefore sent both his Second and Fourth Corps northwards on the 6th from

the British front, a decision which was evidently reached in great haste, for on the forenoon of the 6th our First Corps, advancing towards the Grand Morin, became aware of a column of German infantry moving southwards towards them. This column suddenly turned about and marched northwards without firing a shot, and it would seem that it had only then received information of the change of plan.

The British troops very naturally supposed that the enemy in front of them was in full retreat. They were destined to bring about the retreat of the First German Army, but these first backward movements of the enemy were, though we did not then know it, rather an alteration in the dispositions of the Germans on the battle-field than a retreat. Only von Marwitz's cavalry corps of three divisions was at first left to hold us back. But the German horsemen were not trained to fight on foot and to use the rifle to the same degree as our cavalry, and the small force of Jägers who accompanied them could not be everywhere, so von Marwitz was not able to delay us as von Kluck had hoped, which meant there was less time for the defeat of Manoury. Not only was this so, but Manoury's Army was growing in strength, so that more and not less time was required to accomplish its defeat. We therefore find von Kluck continually adopting expedients

to stay the British advance, now reinforcing von Marwitz with such stray infantry as he can get together, now sending him additional artillery, and towards the end borrowing more cavalry from his neighbour von Bülow.

The course of the battle is then that Manoury becomes more and more heavily engaged as von Kluck develops his strength against him, but being continually reinforced by the troops sent out from Paris is just able to hold his own. The British and the French Fifth Armies drive the Germans opposed to them steadily northwards, while Foch in the centre, fighting desperately and counter-attacking whenever he gets an opportunity, is slowly pushed back to the south of La Fère Champenoise.

September 8 was a critical day on the left flank. Manoury, very hard pressed throughout the morning and the afternoon, was forced to give ground, some of his troops, especially his gallant Seventh Corps which had been fighting since the beginning of the battle, were becoming exhausted, while his left was in danger of envelopment as Von Kluck deployed more and more troops upon his northern flank. During the day the Germans captured Betz and pressed forward towards Nanteuil, attacking at the same time the whole of Manoury's front as far south as the out-

skirts of Meaux. But the stream of reinforcements from Paris was flowing steadily north-east. The Forty-fifth Division had arrived on the 6th, as had one division of the Fourth Corps, which had gone to support the British left south of Meaux. The first of d'Amade's divisions came into action on the 7th, and now on the critical 8th the remaining division of the Fourth Corps, which had been rushed out of Paris by Gallieni in motor-buses and taxis the day before, was brought into line. Thus the French Sixth Army was holding on gallantly, while the advance of the British and the Fifth Armies was now beginning to tell.

We entered Coulommiers early on the 7th, and found that von Kluck's Second Corps had left it in great haste the previous day. The little town had been thoroughly pillaged by the enemy, who had stolen such provisions and liquor as they could lay their hands upon, carried off any portable valuables, and ruthlessly smashed such as were guilty of the crime of being too large or too heavy for a German haversack. Throughout the day there were a number of engagements at various times along our front with the enemy's cavalry, who were everywhere thrown back. On the 8th we continued our advance northwards to the Petit Morin, where von Marwitz's cavalry, supported by infantry and some heavy artillery, made another

stand in order to hold us up. The Guard Rifles,[1] brought up hastily in lorries, had entrenched a position along the river at Orly, and were told to hold it to the last, orders which they carried out to the letter when deserted by the German cavalry, for in the end we either killed or captured almost the whole of the force. Throughout the forenoon the enemy made resolute attempts to hold the line of the Petit Morin from Montmirail to its junction with the Marne at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, but by noon after a stiff fight Allenby's cavalry, with the help of Haig's infantry, had forced the passages of the river about ten miles to the west of Montmirail, and the German cavalry, fearing to be cut off on the Marne, retired, leaving their infantry, who were closely engaged with the heads of our infantry columns, to look after themselves. The day ended with our troops well across the Petit Morin, having taken several hundred prisoners, and a few guns, while Franchet d'Espérey on our right also crossed the river with his left and drove back the Germans from Montmirail.

This first considerable capture of German prisoners had a most inspiriting effect upon our men, and the infantry, who a short time before would barely support the weight of their packs,

[1] The force consisted of parts both of the Guard Jägers and Guard Schützen regiments.

now with the British soldier's passion for souvenirs merrily loaded themselves with the shakos of the Guard Rifles, with captured rifles and even with the heavy German greatcoats.

Von Kluck, on hearing that we had forced the Petit Morin, gave orders for the bridges over the Marne to be destroyed, but he was too late, and his cavalry could only blow up those at La Ferté sous-Jouarre.

It was with great joy that our main columns advancing at dawn on the 9th [1] found that not only were the bridges to the west of Château-Thierry intact, but that the enemy had made no attempt to hold this part of the Marne. The river here runs through a deep gully, the cliffs on the north bank being crowned with thick beech woods, from which the roads winding down to the bridges on the south side are in full view, and had the enemy posted a few guns and machine-guns in these woods it would have been a matter of great difficulty either to locate them exactly or to judge of his strength. The position was, in fact, admirably suited for delay, but von Marwitz's horses were exhausted, he had been given a bigger task than he could carry out, his men had been roughly handled the day before, and he was no longer capable even of attempting to close all the doors

[1] For the position on September 9 see Map IV.

which opened upon von Kluck's flank and rear. It was not until we were well established on the heights north of the river that the German guns opened upon us, and as early as 9 A.M. on the 9th our Second Corps had not only crossed the Marne, but the leading brigade of the Third Division was established more than four miles beyond the river, on the Château-Thierry—Lizy road, where it was well north of the latitude of von Kluck's left flank, which was fighting hard with Manoury across the Ourcq, twelve miles to the west. Had we then been able to press forward on the whole front we might well have cut off a considerable part of the German First Army. But unfortunately the First Corps on the right was delayed for some little time by a threat of attack on its flank from Château-Thierry, which was still held by the enemy, and was unable to come into line until the afternoon, and the Third Corps on the left, which was endeavouring to cross at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, was checked at that place, both by the destruction of the bridges and by the enemy's defence of the line of the Marne at this point. The delay enabled the Germans to patch up some sort of defensive line across the bend of the Marne between Château-Thierry and Lizy. Von Richthofen's cavalry from the German Second Army came from the east to help the hard-pressed von Marwitz, while von Kluck reinforced

his horse with hastily assembled infantry detachments, and swung round some of his heavy artillery to support them. During the afternoon there was heavy fighting with this new German screen, in which the 1st battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment had the honour of capturing the first battery of German howitzers which fell into our hands in this war. But long before this the presence of the British forces north of the Marne had taken effect. Von Kluck had at an early hour begun to press his envelopment of Manoury's left flank in a last attempt to complete the defeat of the French before we could intervene, and advancing from the direction of Betz had occupied Nanteuil. It was a question of hours only whether this part of the German plan succeeded or not. Von Kluck's men were very near exhaustion, and for some days past, partly owing to the constant changes in the position of his troops, and partly to the fact that, while Maubeuge held out, the forwarding of supplies to the German right by rail was complicated and difficult, his supply arrangements had not worked smoothly, his men had not therefore been receiving their rations regularly, and many of the prisoners we captured complained that they were hungry. More important still, Germany, like every other Power engaged in the war, had under-estimated the enormous expenditure of am-

munition which the prolonged battles of these days entail, and the supply of shells, which had been heavily drawn upon during the four days' struggle on the Ourcq, was running low. On the other hand, reinforcements in the shape of Landsturm and Landwehr troops sent south from garrison duty in Belgium were on their way to von Kluck, and some indeed had actually arrived, Manoury's troops were as exhausted as his own, he was making real progress round the French left, and a few hours more of resolute effort might yet give him such a victory as would banish all the troubles in which his rash advance across the Marne had involved him.

This was the situation when two pieces of news reached him. Gallieni, again collecting in Paris all the motor-buses, taxis, and lorries which the city could furnish, had sent out in them at an early hour to strengthen Manoury, and to assist in covering the retreat which the evening before had appeared to be inevitable, every soldier he could make available. So his aviators reported to von Kluck that along the roads leading north-east from Paris convoys of motor vehicles of every conceivable type were streaming towards Manoury, at about the same time as he heard that the British had crossed the Marne and were threatening his rear. This combination was too much for him.

In less than three weeks the situation had been completely reversed, and he now found himself in very much the same position as that in which Sir John French had been placed by the arrival of Joffre's telegram at 5 P.M. on August 23. Before 11 A.M. von Kluck had thrown up the sponge, and ordered the retreat of his left and centre, an order extended a few hours later to his right, which in the interval was attacking fiercely, in order to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of the army.

Meanwhile on our right the French Fifth Army, steadily pushing before them the two corps which von Kluck had left behind when he marched against Manoury, at the same time overcame the right of von Bülow's Army and forced it to retire. These successes enabled Franchet d'Espérey to detach his right corps to the help of Foch, who throughout this period had been enduring the heaviest attacks from the left of von Bülow's Army and from von Hausen's Third Army. The arrival of this welcome help enabled Foch to draw back his Forty-second Division, one of the two divisions of the "Iron Corps" which he had commanded and trained before the war, and to place it in reserve under his own hand. Throughout these strenuous days he had been keenly watching for a chance to strike back at the enemy, and now

the chance was forthcoming, and he had the troops to make use of the chance. On the morning of the 9th the Germans renewed their attacks both on Foch and on Langle de Cary, still in the hope of retrieving the situation by breaking through the French centre. But von Kluck's difficulties had been gradually pulling von Bülow more and more to the right, until at last he had not sufficient troops both to help his embarrassed comrade and to continue his attacks upon Foch. Still he had been steadily gaining ground against the French Ninth Army, and a little more might give him all he wanted, so that it was worth taking some risk to keep up the pressure. Therefore to get the necessary troops von Bülow left a gap in his centre between La Fère Champenoise and the marshes of St. Gond.

The situation on the afternoon of the 9th was then that Franchet d'Espérey's Tenth Corps, coming at the critical time to Foch's help, had attacked and was slowly pushing back von Bülow's right, whose flank had become exposed by the retirement of von Kluck's left before the French Fifth Army; the left of Foch's Ninth Army was holding its own south of the marshes against portions of the Prussian Guard. Then came the gap between the marshes and La Fère Champenoise, south of which von Bülow's left of the German Guard and the right of von Hausen's

Army were pressing hard on, and gaining ground against, Foch's centre and right. Thus the issue still hung in the balance, but Foch had his Forty-second Division ready, and between 5 and 6 o'clock in the afternoon he flung it into the gap against the exposed flank of von Bülow's left wing. This in one glorious charge it smashed to pieces, while at the same time the whole of Foch's line advanced to the attack. Under this double pressure from front and flank the German centre broke, turned, and streamed northwards, pursued far into the night under a deluge of rain, as a thunderstorm burst over the battle-field, by Foch's eager infantry. The battle of the Marne was over, and by this crowning mercy the whole German line from Verdun westwards was compelled to follow the example of von Kluck's Army.

Much has been written about the miracle of the Marne, and I yield to no one in my admiration for Foch's generalship and the cool judgement which, after days of almost intolerable strain, he displayed in seizing at once upon the weak spot in the enemy's line and aiming at it, at exactly the right time, a blow which changed what would otherwise have been a limited success into complete victory. Contemporary opinion has already done justice both to Foch's leadership and to the endurance and valour of his troops. Nor has there been any failure to recognise either the splendour of

Manoury's resistance in face of von Kluck's desperate efforts, or Gallieni's resource and enterprise which contributed so much to the final victory. But nowhere yet, so far as I am aware, has justice been done to the part played by the British Army in this glorious episode. Our men were not called upon to fight as they had fought at Mons and at Le Cateau, nor as Foch's and Manoury's men had had to fight in this battle. But I am convinced that history will decide that it was the crossing of the Marne in the early hours of the 9th by the British Army which turned the scale against von Kluck and saved Manoury at a time of crisis. At the time when we were crossing the Marne the French Sixth Army was very near the limits of its endurance, and, as I have already indicated, Gallieni had begun to take the measures necessary to prepare for a retreat. Manoury on the morning of the 9th had been forced to act defensively along his whole front, and though it is probable that von Kluck had realised by then that he could not overcome the gallant Frenchman in the time left to him, yet it cannot be maintained that an army on the defensive, however stout its resistance, can of itself compel an enemy to retire as fast and as far as did von Kluck's army. The left of the French Fifth Army did not reach the Marne until the evening, and therefore it can hardly have

affected the German general's decision of the forenoon. Foch's blow at La Fère Champenoise was not struck until late in the afternoon, and it is impossible that the news of von Bülow's defeat could have reached von Kluck until late in the night; yet he had evacuated Betz as early as 11 A.M., and by 4 P.M., that is, before Foch's orders for his master-stroke had taken effect, both our cavalry and our airmen reported the German columns on our front were streaming northwards. It is therefore not possible to arrive at any other conclusion than that it was the menace of the British advance to his flank and rear which precipitated von Kluck's decision, caused the Germans to begin their retreat, and saved Manoury at a time when he was in grave danger.

The retreat from Mons is already a glorious page in the history of the British Army, but the advance after the retreat is certainly no less remarkable. That an army, which on August 23 had been all but surrounded by an enemy who outnumbered it by two to one, should have fought its way out, retreated 170 miles, and then immediately turned about and taken a decisive part in the battle which changed the course of the campaign of 1914, is as wonderful an achievement as is to be found in the history of war.

Amidst all the feats of endurance, courage,

and devotion which marked these memorable days, feats of which we have as yet heard but a very meagre tale, for many of the finest were performed by men who have spent long years of heart-breaking captivity in German prison camps and their stories have not been heard, there is nothing of which we may be prouder than of the behaviour of the men, and of the devotion to them of their officers and non-commissioned officers, not in the days of battle only, but in the far more trying days and nights of weary tramping in retreat. At first the bonds of discipline were of necessity relaxed, small parties became separated from their own battalions and joined up with others which they did not know and where they were not known, individual stragglers who had dropped behind from exhaustion or had lost their way were frequent, and rations, despite the exertions of the Army Service Corps, could not always be got to the troops. There was every opportunity and excuse for excess, yet there was none, and it is not only in the rapid change from retreat to advance that the story of the retreat from Mons may challenge comparison with that of the retreat to Corunna.

I well remember on the morning of August 28 meeting in a small French town the commander of a company of a famous regiment, who, to my certain knowledge, had not in the previous

sixty hours had more than a few odd snatches of sleep, and had passed the whole of the previous night tramping with his men. He had been told that he would have three hours' rest, and he spent the greater part of it in driving round the town in a light cart he had borrowed buying any food he could discover, and paying for it out of his own pocket such prices as the inhabitants liked to ask. This is one small example, but it is typical of the spirit of the British Army. It did not occur to this officer that he was doing anything out of the ordinary; his men had had no food since the previous morning, and his first duty was to look after his men. The food might have been taken by force, and no one would have been the wiser, for the Germans would be in the town in a few hours and would help themselves without payment, but for the honour of Britain—I will not say of England for my friend was a Scot—and for the honour of the Army all things had to be done in order. He had told his men that he would get them a breakfast, so while he went marketing they tightened their belts and waited patiently in the midst of comparative plenty, for the German advance had come like a bolt from the blue and the inhabitants had had little time to remove their stocks. The Germans boast loudly of the iron discipline of their army, but

when we compare the behaviour of their soldiers in retreat with that of our men in like circumstances, we may thank God that British discipline, which depends first and foremost on the relations between officer and man, is of a very different type, and rejoice that it stood better than the enemy's rigid rules the severest test which war can bring. Everywhere as we advanced we found a trail of wanton destruction—the wine shops gutted, the village streets littered with broken bottles, household treasures too heavy to remove wantonly destroyed; and this time it was not the organised and systematic brutality which had ravished Belgium as part of a military plan, but the dissolution of order which left the German soldiery free to follow their natures and rob and pillage at will.

Before I close this chapter there is one criticism of our advance which must be met. Von Kluck took two whole corps away from the front which the British Army was directed by Joffre's order to attack, to fling them against Manoury, and it has been hinted in some quarters that the German was only able to do this because we failed to play our part. This is an assumption which is in no way warranted by the facts. On the afternoon of September 4 Joffre had requested Sir John French to move his army to the south of the forest

of Crécy, because the French Fifth Army had again been compelled to fall back, and he required more room to the south of the Grand Morin to combine the operations of his Fifth Army with those of the new Ninth Army, which had come into line on Franchet d'Espérey's right. So it came about that on the morning of September 5, after marching all night, our main bodies were some fifteen miles south-east of Coulommiers. Now von Kluck became aware of his danger on the evening of September 5, and began to march his Second Corps northwards from Coulommiers at an early hour the next day. It was therefore clearly out of the power of the British Army, placed as it was, and with a strong screen of German cavalry between it and the Grand Morin, to have prevented this movement. It was, as I have said, unfortunate that we could not get more troops across the Marne in the early hours of the eventful 9th, for, could we have done so, we might have utterly smashed von Kluck's embarrassed left. But Sir Douglas Haig, who was at the time well in advance of the French Fifth Army, was delayed by von Richthofen's movement from the east to support von Marwitz, just as the Third Corps was delayed by the broken bridges of the Marne. It was known that there were large German forces on our right, and an attack upon our right flank

while our main bodies were in the act of crossing the Marne was just such a manœuvre as the enemy might be expected to attempt in order to get himself out of his difficulties. Had Sir Douglas Haig known that von Kluck had decided on retreat and that the force reported to be moving west from Château-Thierry was composed of cavalry coming to cover the retreat, he probably would not have checked his march, but he knew none of these things, and until he was more certain of the situation it would obviously have been the height of imprudence to risk the passage of an important river. Of such are the accidents of war. Neither Sir John French nor his corps commanders had, or could by any possibility have had, at the moment the knowledge of the situation which we now possess, and it is from the standpoint of what he knew at the time and how he acted upon his knowledge that a commander in war should be judged, not from the standpoint of knowledge collected after the event. It needs small skill to be a general when all the enemy's plans and dispositions are exposed. Therefore it is not in the light of what might have been achieved had the circumstances been different that the effect of the advance of the British Army must be judged, but rather by what was actually accomplished, and this, as I have tried to show, was no mean thing.

CHAPTER IX

THE HIGHER COMMAND IN WAR

My object in the foregoing chapters has been to explain the part taken by our original expeditionary force in the first phase of the war, and to display the strong and weak points in the German armour. Owing to the surprise achieved by the German General Staff, Sir John French's Army had to meet the full weight of the instrument which the enemy had designed to be the chief means of carrying to complete victory his campaign in the West—von Kluck's Army. Our officers and men had been taught in peace time that decisive results in war can only be obtained by attack, and that the defensive is the refuge of the weak. Looking hopefully to the relief of Belgium by an offensive campaign, they had been thrown at once upon the defence, and their first experience of modern European war was hurried retreat. They saw at once something had gone very wrong with the Allied plans. Moreover, when Joffre, pivoting on

Verdun, was compelled to swing back the northern section of his line, we on the outer flank had to carry out the longest retreat, in the most exposed position, and in face of an enemy of not less than twice our strength. It is the highest possible tribute to the quality and training of the Old Army that in these circumstances it not only retained its *moral* and cohesion, but played a leading part in bringing to naught the enemy's dreams of a rapid conquest of France. It saved the French Fifth Army from destruction, when, standing alone at Mons, it drew upon itself von Kluck's attack. If the First German Army had been able to come down upon de Lanrezac's flank when he was retreating before von Bülow from the battle-field of the Sambre, the Germans might well have succeeded in their ambition of rolling up the French line from the left.

Looking back now at the situation in which we were placed on the morning of August 24, it seems almost incredible that we should have escaped destruction. No less marvellous is it that Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's force should on the 26th have been able to break off in broad daylight a battle with an enemy of more than twice its strength and five days later have been in a condition to fight again with effect. That the German leaders misjudged the situation and missed chances which

now appear obvious does not detract from the achievement of our men. The chances were missed because the enemy's plans were upset by cool leadership in almost desperate circumstances, and by the dogged and skilful fighting of the British soldier, who surprised the enemy, first by the unexpected vigour of his resistance, and then by his no less unexpected recovery. The German plan of envelopment was finally foiled when von Kluck, after changing direction and making forced marches south-eastwards from Amiens to cut off the French Fifth Army from the Marne, came upon us on September 1 an organised and formidable force. The enemy's plan of campaign was fundamentally changed by that encounter with an army which he thought he had completely defeated. The march round had become impossible, and its place had to be taken by the break through, and so the first battle of the Marne was brought about. Our Army had in the interval helped to gain time for Joffre to prepare his scheme of counter-attack after his first offensive plans had collapsed. When the counter-attack came we saved Manoury, as we had saved de Lanrezac, were the first of the Allied forces to cross the Marne in pursuit of the enemy, and were one of the main factors in bringing about von Kluck's retreat to the Aisne.

I have in discussing the events of the retreat

from Mons tried to make clear where and how the German leaders failed in the execution of their plan. There was nothing in the way in which von Kluck turned to account the position of overwhelming superiority in which he was placed on the morning of August 23 to compare in point of generalship with Sir John French's extrication of his army from the jaws of destruction. Armies have in the past been placed in situations almost equally perilous, but I can recall no instance in which they have escaped with so little damage to themselves and so much loss to the enemy, nor any in which they have passed so quickly from retreat to an advance against their pursuers. There was nothing in Moltke's manœuvring of his armies, when once battle was joined, which bears comparison with the manner in which Joffre, with the fate of his country and of Europe on his shoulders, quietly and calmly picked up the broken threads of his first plans, and wove them afresh into a formidable and successful scheme of attack. There was no German general who, in these opening battles of the war, showed a glimpse of such inspiration as Foch displayed in his counter-stroke at La Fère Champenoise. No, it was not by generalship in the field and by the way in which their generals dealt with the daily changes in the military situation that the Germans won their initial advantage

in the West, and yet they did win such advantages as all the efforts of the Allies from the beginning of 1915 until the summer of 1918 failed to wrest from them. They carried the war into the country of their enemies, overran Belgium, occupied the rich industrial districts of Northern France, and while doing this held off the Russian hosts. In population, wealth, manufacturing capacity, and even in the strength of their naval and military forces, the Central Powers were, at the outbreak of war, in the aggregate inferior to their enemies. If their generals were not superior to the Allied commanders in qualities of leadership, and their troops in no way pre-eminent in valour, how did they gain the preponderating position which they held for so long ?

The Germans schemed for this war, devoted long years to preparation for it, and entered it thoroughly organised for a struggle of nations. That is universally recognised. We have more than paid a just tribute to the capacity of our chief enemy for organisation. Yet, save in one respect, we have proved ourselves to be at least his equal. Given the fact that we had never grasped the meaning of a war for national existence, that we did not want war at all, and were in no way ready for it, our achievements in organisation are in no way inferior to his. We have done

what he believed to be impossible, in raising and placing in the field new armies many times as strong as the forces which we maintained in time of peace. We have kept open for ourselves and our Allies the sea communications of the world. Our financial organisation has from the first been superior to his. In our arrangements for the control of our food supply we have notably improved upon the methods of Germany. The enemy has produced no weapon or device applicable to modern war which we have not at least equalled, and in most cases surpassed. We have often been lamentably slow in getting to work, but in all these cases we have shown no lack of organising power when the matter was really taken in hand. The one respect in which we have failed has been in the organisation of our Higher Command. By this I do not mean merely the arrangements for the control of our naval and military forces, but rather the machinery for the co-ordination of policy with naval and military strategy, machinery which I may call, in short, the government of the war.

The elder Moltke was, as the result of his experiences in 1870, the first to perceive that Napoleon's aphorism "in war men are nothing, the man is everything" did not apply absolutely to the nation in arms. He realised that the importance of organisation in times of peace had

enormously increased, and believed, as his successors have believed, that the nation which was best organised could obtain such a start as no efforts made during the course of a war by laggards in preparation could make good. He saw that armies numbering millions could not be influenced by the personality of their General-in-Chief in the way in which Napoleon influenced his armies, that there would be less scope for the intervention of the Higher Command on the battle-field, and more need for careful planning before battle was joined. Lastly, he grasped the essential fact that in a war for national existence it would no longer be a question of employing military force to the best advantage but of combining the whole power of the nation, the whole political, diplomatic, naval, military, financial, and industrial strength of the country for the defeat of the enemy. Such a burden could not be borne by any one man, and therefore he designed to assist and in some measure to replace the man by a system.

It is unnecessary for me here to describe in detail the constitution and organisation of the German General Staff. This has long ago been admirably done by Professor Spenser Wilkinson in his little book *The Brain of an Army*. My purpose is to sketch briefly the working of the system in relation to the supreme control in time

of war. The basis of the system is the separation of administration from command, that is, of responsibility for what I may call the business side of war from responsibility for the planning and conduct of military operations. The planning side presents to the business side its estimate of what is needed to ensure the success of any given campaign or operations in men, transport, supplies, munitions, and material of all kinds. If the bill cannot be met the plan is bad, and has to be modified to fit in with the available resources. The planning side is so organised that there are selected and trained experts to deal with the details of any particular problem which may arise. The work of these experts is co-ordinated by higher authority and presented to the head of the whole organisation in a reasoned form. It is then the business of the chief to see that plans so prepared in accordance with his instructions are made known, as far as may be necessary, to such other departments of state as may be affected, and to present to the supreme authority of the state a complete proposal as to military policy, for the execution of which he is responsible when it has been accepted. The chief point of the system is that one man and one man only is in a position to advise the supreme authority in this manner, and he is the Chief of the General Staff, who alone has at his disposal

the machinery for preparing considered advice, and for supervising the execution of the approved policy.

Moltke said of his system towards the end of his career that it would aid a genius if Germany were so fortunate as to possess a genius in time of need, and could be worked effectively by a man of ordinary capacity who had been trained to understand and use it. He held that no system of control in war could be sound which depended for success on the accident of a genius being at hand when required, and that modern national life was so complex that no genius could, without the help of a complete and scientific organisation, make full use of its potentialities for war. In an outburst of complacence he said, in reviewing his life work, that he had left his country a system of command which no other nation could equal. He has proved to have been very nearly but fortunately not quite right. He did not foresee the evils which result from placing in the hands of an autocratic authority such an instrument as an all-powerful and highly organised General Staff. He did not foresee that Prussian Junkerdom would use the instrument which he had created to further its own base ends. Both he and Bismarck, neither of them unduly troubled by conscience, as the piece of trickery by which they brought about

the war of 1870 shows, must have turned many times in their graves at the stupidity of their successors in ranging the rest of the civilised world against the Central Powers. He did not foresee a war of such length as would give the enemies of Germany time to make good their defects in preparation. He did not foresee that his system, too rigidly applied by ordinary men, brought up in blind faith in its efficacy, would limit their power of dealing with the unexpected and weaken their initiative in the field. The German system of command has not escaped the evil which has affected the whole national life of Germany, the evil against which we are fighting, but its underlying principles are none the less sound, and despite all the errors which our enemies have made in its application, it remains a terribly effective instrument for the conduct of war. If we turn our minds back to what we expected Germany to achieve when she forced the world into war, and compare this with what she actually accomplished in 1914, if we reflect that it was not fighting or generalship in the field but careful planning and organisation which placed the German armies in the position of overwhelming superiority in which they found themselves when they first met the Allied forces in the West, if we consider that it was again planning and organisation which were

near giving Germany complete success in the spring of 1918, when she once more sought to decide the war in the West,[1] we must admit that a system which can produce such results at least merits respectful consideration.

We have, as I have already pointed out, learned much from the enemy in this war. Where his weapons proved superior to our own we have copied or improved upon them. We have carefully studied his tactical methods and gained by the study. It is therefore logical that we should also study his methods of conducting war, taking from them for our use what is good and rejecting what is evil. Yet in this respect we have lagged behind, and constructed slowly and painfully a machinery of our own without sufficiently profiting by the experience we have gained or by the example which the enemy has set us.

All European armies, and ours among the rest, have adapted the German General Staff's system in one form or another, to their own special conditions, but we have not yet succeeded in welding the General Staff system into the machinery of government in time of war. We still as a nation are unable to distinguish the essential difference

[1] It was the planning and preparation during the previous winter, as much as the transference of troops from the Eastern front to the Western, which led to Germany's success in March 1918.

between the military opinion of individual soldiers and the military opinion of the responsible head of a scientific organisation. We still confound command and administration, to the detriment of both. We began in August 1914 with the mistaken notion that we could go into European war with a limited liability. For a war of limited liability our preparations were adequate. The mobilisation and despatch to France of our little Expeditionary Force were completed smoothly and efficiently, thanks to devoted work at the War Office, carried through in face of great difficulties. Owing to the labours of the Committee of Imperial Defence the Departments of State knew what they would be required to do in such a war. But it occurred to no one in authority that our system of government in time of peace would require profound modification in time of war, and no one had thought out what form such modification should take. Relying on the individual rather than the system, the nation placed at the head of its military administration the soldier in whom it had the greatest confidence, and was for a time content. Fortunately for ourselves and for Europe Lord Kitchener proved himself at once to be a man of wider vision and sounder judgement, on the broad issues of the war, than any other statesman either in our own, in Allied, or in enemy

countries. He at once scouted the theory of limited liability, and set to work to organise the Empire for a prolonged struggle, thereby saving both us and our Allies.

Unfortunately almost the whole of Lord Kitchener's military and administrative career had been spent in the outer parts of the Empire. He was unfamiliar with our methods of government, and had not been brought into touch with the modern General Staff system. He had placed upon his shoulders the intolerable burden of administration and of command. He had at one and the same time to undertake the tasks of raising us to the rank of a first-rate military power and of acting as the supreme military adviser to the Government on the conduct of the war. He did not himself realise until after he had been for some considerable time in office that this system was wrong, and by the time he did realise it, it had already broken down. The Dardanelles Commission puts the matter clearly and tersely in the following words: "We are of opinion that Lord Kitchener did not sufficiently avail himself of the services of his General Staff, with the result that more work was undertaken by him than was possible for one man to do, and that confusion and want of efficiency resulted."[1] The Commission

[1] Dardanelles Commission, First Report, 1917, p. 43.

might have added that on the principle of limited liability the General Staff at the War Office, considering that there would be no scope for its energies in London, had been transferred almost in a body to France.

Lord Kitchener had, owing to his reputation and strength of character, a commanding position in the councils of the State, and this had the unfortunate result that many who realised that something was wrong came to the conclusion that the fault lay in giving a soldier too much authority rather than in the defects in the machinery of government. Our principle of government in time of peace has always been to place authority in the hands of men who are not experts, to leave them free to consult such experts as they wished, and to draw their own conclusions after hearing the opinions of these experts. This will not work in time of war, because, as I have explained, under any properly organised system of military command there can only be one expert who is in a position to give authoritative and responsible military advice to the Government. Our troubles in this war have arisen, not because our Governments have neglected to take military advice, but almost invariably because they have not confined themselves to the right kind of military advice. If Ministers seek advice on the conduct of war

from a number of soldiers, taking this man's advice on one point, and that man's on another, they are impressed chiefly by each individual soldier's power of expressing himself, and of urging his views, and not by the one consideration which gives his advice value, namely, whether it is the result of careful and detailed examination of all the factors involved in the problem in question. Only the soldier with the machinery at his disposal to enable him to conduct such an examination can, the conditions of war being such as they now are, give advice as it should be given; the others may occasionally be right, they will more often be wrong. Under any other system Ministers have themselves to piece together a mosaic of military policy, and this they have not the necessary technical knowledge to do, while they are tempted almost irresistibly to select from each adviser that advice which suits best their preconceived ideas and policy.

An extreme instance of the weakness of our system of conducting war is the manner in which the decision to advance to Baghdad in the autumn of 1915 was reached. The Government had before them the opinion of the general on the spot, who looked at the matter from the local point of view, but who was not adequately equipped with the means of forming an opinion as to the forces which

the enemy could bring to his theatre of war from elsewhere. They consulted the Commander-in-Chief in India, who was not responsible for the collection of information about the Turkish forces, which was the business of the General Staff at the War Office. They consulted the General Staff at the War Office, which was not responsible for the conduct of these operations, and was not fully informed of the condition of the troops or the state of the transport. They consulted the Military Secretary at the India Office, who was not responsible in any way for the conduct of the campaign. In all this galaxy of advisers there was not one in a position to review the whole problem, and to propose a plan which took all the factors into account.

The Mesopotamia Commission summed up the matter as follows :

The dual system under which London and Simla tried to conduct the campaign in Mesopotamia has obvious drawbacks. The chain of responsibility is greatly lengthened by the number of authorities who had necessarily to be consulted, and who had a voice in the direction of affairs. We will enumerate the various authorities who had to be consulted with regard to the Mesopotamian Expedition : first the General Officer commanding on the spot in Mesopotamia, then the Commander-in-Chief in India, then the Viceroy, then the Secretary of State for India, with his Military Secretary, then the War Council, with the Imperial

Staff, and finally the Cabinet. Such a subdivision of authoritative control must weaken the sense of responsibility of each authority consulted, and it certainly has made it very difficult accurately to apportion blame or credit. It was under the dual system of control that the administrative failures took place during 1915 in Mesopotamia, and it was not until London took over sole charge that there was any marked improvement in the management of the campaign. The improvement and success since effected are a striking illustration of the all-importance of unity of control in time of war.[1]

We have travelled some distance since those days, but still not far enough. We have solved the complex problem of unity of command in France, with results which are patent to every one, but we have still to accept the principle of unity of advice at home. I doubt if there is any responsible British statesman to-day who would not say that it is not only his right but his duty to call in a second opinion when he is in doubt. As recently as May 1918 a Member of the War Cabinet said that in this very case of the Mesopotamian campaign the cause of our troubles lay in placing too much authority in the hands of the soldiers, and if this statement represents the views of the Government it shows that the Commission has laboured in vain.[2]

[1] Mesopotamia Commission, Report, 1917, p. 117.

[2] " I myself had bitter experience of it in India, and any one

Ministers feeling deeply their responsibility and their ignorance of strategy are naturally loth to place themselves unreservedly in the hands of a soldier. Yet the acceptance of the principle of unity of advice does not debar the Government from obtaining any opinions or any views which it may desire to hear; it merely ensures that all opinions and views are presented to it through one channel, so that they may be tested, examined, and criticised in relation to other plans and proposals. It means, in short, system and organisation.

System and organisation will not eliminate the human factor, but they will reduce, if they cannot abolish, the chances of error. The most perfect General Staff will make mistakes in war, because the conduct of war still depends largely upon guessing what the enemy is thinking and planning, and the best generals or the best staff can only hope to guess right more often than they guess wrong. Any human organisation depends for efficiency on the character and personality of its chief, and none more so than an organisation for the conduct of war. Further, it is of the very first importance that there should be the most

---

who had read the Mesopotamian Report would see the results of setting up a military administration practically independent of civil control" (Lord Curzon speaking at Caxton Hall, May 19, 1918).

complete trust and confidence between the Government and their military adviser, and if they should be limited to one consultant at a time there should be no limit to their choice of that consultant. If the Government is not satisfied with the advice which they receive, the remedy is to change the adviser, not to seek a second opinion. In one important respect we have drifted backwards, since the Secretary of State for War has again been made responsible to the Government and to Parliament both for the administration of our military forces and for the conduct of the war. This change has been made on Constitutional grounds. But surely the principle of our Constitution is that Ministers should be responsible to Parliament, and it cannot be a serious subversion of this principle that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should report directly to, and be responsible to, the War Cabinet, who in turn are responsible to Parliament. There is nothing of militarism in such an arrangement, which strengthens rather than weakens the authority of the Civil Government: there lurks behind it no peril to our liberties.

Either the Secretary of State for War's responsibility for the conduct of military operations is real, in which case he is overburdened, just as Lord Kitchener was overburdened, for the supervision of the administration of our huge armies

and all that it involves is more than sufficient to occupy the energies of the veriest glutton for work, or it is nominal, in which case it is a farce. From a military point of view there are very real advantages in placing the Commanders-in-Chief in the field in direct communication with the military adviser to the Government. Such a system defines responsibility and would avoid so absurd a situation as that in which Mr. Chamberlain was placed by the report of the Mesopotamia Commission. Mr. Chamberlain was held to be responsible for the conduct of operations in Mesopotamia, but it is quite obvious that, under the system as it existed, he did not and could not exercise any real control, and that he could not have acted otherwise than he did act. He was the victim of our neglect to organise on scientific lines a central control of the war.

At the present time this central control is vested in a War Cabinet, which is concerned not only with war policy but with the domestic policy of the whole Empire. We have been told that this Cabinet meets on an average more than once a day throughout the year. It is often concerned with the gravest social and political problems which have no direct bearing on the conduct of the war, and in these circumstances one wonders what time the members can have for quiet thinking about

the essential question, how to obtain victory in the shortest possible time. The War Cabinet is composed of Ministers without portfolios, not in direct touch with the great War Departments of State, and it is necessary that its members should be kept constantly informed upon all naval and military questions. This entails the attendance of their naval and military advisers at almost every meeting, and therefore seriously curtails the time which those advisers are able to give to the consideration of the problems of naval and military strategy which are their special province. In fact, just as responsibility is over-centralised in the Secretary of State for War, so it is over-centralised in the War Cabinet. What we require is a Great General Headquarters for the Empire, charged wholly and solely with the conduct of the war, and responsible for the co-ordination of political, naval, and military effort for the defeat of the enemy. Such a body, composed of the heads of the various War Departments, with the Prime Minister in the chair, and with the chiefs of the naval, military, and air staffs directly responsible to it, would not require to meet daily, for its members, being, for the most part, *ex officio* conversant with the course of the war, would not require to meet for the purpose of keeping abreast of events, but solely for the purpose of deciding on important questions of war

policy and strategy. Such questions do not arise daily, and they should, if the organisation is sound, be questions rather concerning the distant future than current events. An organisation which has time to think, plan, and prepare should rarely be surprised, and there is no surer indication of defective government in war than the need for hasty measures to meet unforeseen emergencies.

We have come to regard " muddling through " as an inevitable factor in our conduct of war, and after each war we tinker with the army and hope that things will be better next time. We have consistently failed to recognise that the cause of our failures is defective machinery for control of affairs, in the widest sense, in time of war. Occasionally some statesman has grasped this fact, and said with a sigh that the British Constitution cannot be adapted to the conduct of war. This is not the case. If it were we might well despair of the future of the British Democracy, for a system of government which is incapable of dealing with war as it would deal with pestilence or any of the great social evils stands condemned. The plain fact is that no British statesman had before this war ever given his mind to the conduct of a national war, and when national war came our rulers have been too busy in meeting the emergencies of the day to give time to the solution of this by no means

insoluble problem. To solve it we do not require any revolution half so drastic as that which placed the whole government of the country in the hands of a committee of six, but we do require to meet an organised enemy by counter-organisation.

Everything that I have said here as to the conduct of military operations applies with equal force to naval operations, and still more to the combination of both. We, the greatest sea power in the world, have made but one attempt in this war to employ naval and military force in co-operation, and that, owing to the neglect of the first principles of organisation in war, was a failure. Military strategy is to the amateur more fascinating than a chess problem, and in appearance not more difficult to grasp. Naval strategy is too technical, too closely affected by the mighty forces of nature to be congenial to the dabbler. The maintenance of the vast land forces of these days touches every aspect of national life, and five voters are personally affected by a national army to one whom a national navy concerns. So the Army is subjected to a perpetual inquisition; the plant is continually being pulled up to see how the roots are growing, while the Navy is left to itself, and the combined power of the Navy and Army is neglected. We shall never make the best and fullest use of our whole power either for war or

for peace until those responsible for its direction have time to think, and the means to translate their thoughts rapidly and effectively into action. The whole of the War Cabinet and most of its servants are overworked, and an organisation which is overworked is defective. We have in the end gained complete victory, but we could have gained it more quickly had our Governments been organised for war. We alone of the Allies have conducted campaigns in three continents. No other of the nations engaged in this world war has been confronted by naval and military problems of such variety and complexity as we have been. None, therefore, needed a more carefully-thought-out organisation, and none has one which is so ill-adapted to the waging of war. We owe it alike to the men who have fallen, to those who have fought and won, and to posterity to put this matter right. If we learn from our experiences in the war to appreciate the value of scientific organisation, we shall not have fought in vain. If we do not, we shall not establish such a peace as we desire.

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY, LTD.

CAMPAIGNS & THEIR LESSONS

EDITED BY

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR C. E. CALLWELL, K.C.B.

THE MARNE CAMPAIGN. By Lieut.-Colonel F. E. WHITTON. Demy 8vo. 8 Maps. 10s. 6d. net.

"He is clear and concise, and his book gives a much better general impression of the Battle of the Marne than any other we know. . . . His map of the disposition of the German, French and British Armies during the halt and swing-back of the Germans is invaluable."—*Saturday Review.*

IN THE SAME SERIES

TIRAH, 1897. By Major-General Sir C. E. CALLWELL, K.C.B. 5s. net.

BOHEMIA, 1866. By Major NEIL MALCOLM. 5s. net.

THE CAMPAIGN OF LIAO-YANG. By Major H. ROWAN ROBINSON. 6s. 6d. net.

THE DESERT CAMPAIGNS. By W. T. MASSEY. With 24 Illustrations from Drawings made on the spot by JAMES MCBEY. 6s. net.

"It gives an admirably clear account of the operations, and enables me at least to understand the difficulties of the campaign and appreciate the fine work of the troops far better than I did."—*Westminster Gazette.*

MONS AND THE RETREAT. By Captain G. S. GORDON. Preface by Lord FRENCH, and a Map. 1s. 6d. net.

In this vividly written book the full story of the British retreat is authoritatively described from official records by an officer attached to the General Staff.

RAISING AND TRAINING THE NEW ARMIES. By Major BASIL WILLIAMS. 5s. net.

An interesting and authoritative account of the manner in which the vast armies of the British Empire were raised and trained for the great tasks which they accomplished in the war.

CONSTABLE & CO., LTD., 10 ORANGE STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

DEDUCTIONS FROM THE WORLD WAR. By Lieut.-General Baron VON FREYTAG-LORINGHOVEN. Fourth Impression. 2s. 6d. net.

"A singularly illuminating revelation of the untamed spirit of Prussian militarism."—*Truth.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A NATION TRAINED IN ARMS OR A MILITIA? 4s. net.

"Let us hope this admirable little treatise, by the ablest of Germany's military critics, will be carefully studied."—*Morning Post.*

GOVERNMENT AND THE WAR. By SPENSER WILKINSON, Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford. 6s. net.

"A volume whose clearness and cogency entitle its author to be described as the British Clausewitz."—*Punch.*

TOPOGRAPHY AND STRATEGY IN THE WAR. By DOUGLAS W. JOHNSON, Associate Professor of Physiography, Columbia University. Demy 8vo. 20 Maps and numerous Illustrations. 10s. 6d. net.

By the aid of carefully prepared maps the Author gives a clear and accurate picture of each theatre of war, and, in particular, shows that the part played by land-forms in plans of campaign and movements of armies is no less important to-day than in the past.

TELEGRAPHY, AERONAUTICS, AND WAR. By CHARLES BRIGHT, F.R.S.E. 16s. net.

"A valuable and helpful contribution to a serious and important problem."—*Field.*

THE BRITISH FLEET IN THE GREAT WAR. By ARCHIBALD HURD. 7s. 6d. net.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SEA POWER AND THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH NAVY. 1s. net.

ITALIAN SEA POWER AND THE GREAT WAR. 2s. net.